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Inclusive education in the Ecuadorian University: The role of academic personnel's social and emotional competencies

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Keywords

Socio-emotional competencies
Higher education
Inclusion
Academic staff

Abstract

The consolidation of truly inclusive university systems requires a deep understanding of the personal and contextual variables that influence teaching practices. The present study had two objectives: to analyze inclusive education among Ecuadorian university faculty and examine differences according to sociodemographic variables; and to evaluate the relationship between socio-emotional competencies and inclusive education in order to determine the explanatory contribution of socio-emotional competencies and sociodemographic variables to levels of inclusive education. A quantitative, descriptive, cross-sectional ex post facto study was conducted with an incidental sample of 568 university professors (61% men), with a mean age of 43.91 years (*SD* = 9.68). A questionnaire composed of three sections was administered: socio-occupational data of the faculty, the *Socio-Emotional Competencies Questionnaire*, and the *Inclusive Education Scale.* Descriptive, correlational, and comparative analyses were performed, including linear regression analyses. The results indicate predominantly positive levels of inclusive education, with significant differences according to age, training in inclusion, and some dimensions associated with gender, coexistence with minority groups, and ethnic-cultural background. Social awareness and prosocial behavior emerged as the factor with the greatest explanatory contribution to inclusive education. These findings may contribute to the design of institutional policies and teaching practices aimed at fostering inclusive higher education.

Educación inclusiva en la universidad ecuatoriana: el papel de las competencias socioemocionales docentes

Palabras clave

Competencias socioemocionales
Enseñanza superior
Inclusión
Profesorado

Resumen

La consolidación de sistemas universitarios verdaderamente inclusivos requiere una comprensión profunda de las variables personales y contextuales que influyen en las prácticas docentes. El presente estudio tuvo dos objetivos: analizar la educación inclusiva del profesorado universitario ecuatoriano, valorando variables sociodemográficas; y evaluar el papel de las competencias socioemocionales en la educación inclusiva. Se llevó a cabo un estudio cuantitativo, descriptivo transversal *ex post facto*, con una muestra incidental de 568 profesores universitarios (61% hombres), con una edad media de 43.91 años (*DT* = 9.68). Se aplicó un cuestionario compuesto por tres secciones: datos sociolaborales del profesorado, *Cuestionario de Competencias Socioemocionales y la Escala de Educación Inclusiva*. Se realizaron análisis descriptivos, correlacionales y comparativos con regresiones lineales. Los resultados muestran niveles mayoritariamente positivos en educación inclusiva, con diferencias significativas en función de la edad, la formación en inclusión y algunas dimensiones asociadas al género, la convivencia con minorías y la pertenencia étnico-cultural. La conciencia social y conducta prosocial fue identificado con mayor capacidad explicativa sobre la educación inclusiva. Estos hallazgos pueden ayudar al diseño de políticas institucionales y prácticas docentes orientadas hacia una educación universitaria inclusiva.

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Currently, higher education faces the unavoidable challenge of guaranteeing equitable and high-quality learning systems for all students. In this context, Inclusive Education (IE) has ceased to be a supplementary or exclusively school-based policy and has become a central indicator of excellence and social responsibility in university institutions. Its success depends not only on the elimination of architectural or curricular barriers, but also on the human factor: faculty attitudes, teaching practices, and institutional organization (Llorent & Núñez, 2023). IE in the Ecuadorian university context is relatively recent compared to other educational levels (Aguilera, 2022). Although inclusive policies have expanded access and promoted a sense of belonging (Garcés et al., 2022), institutional practices are still undergoing consolidation and do not always comprehensively address student diversity (Delgado et al., 2024). Full inclusion requires, in addition to access, training and social and emotional resources that enable diversity to be valued as a core component of learning (Garcés et al., 2022). Despite progress in this area, there are still gaps in current knowledge regarding the relationship between teachers' perceptions of IE and the role of their social and emotional competencies (SEC).

Inclusive education and teacher characteristics

IE is a continuous process of identifying and eliminating barriers that limit the presence, participation, and learning of all students, especially those in situations of greater vulnerability (Booth & Ainscow, 2015). Inclusive practices implemented by university faculty have demonstrated positive effects both on students and on teachers themselves, depending on individual and contextual characteristics. Previous studies have identified differences associated with teachers' sociodemographic characteristics. Regarding age, findings are mixed. In Ecuador, more favorable attitudes have been reported among younger faculty members (Tárraga-Mínguez et al., 2020), whereas in Spain, greater organization of IE was found among older teachers (Llorent, Zych et al., 2020b). The same study found that women display more favorable attitudes toward IE compared to men.

The scientific literature has also explored whether more favorable attitudes toward IE are associated with cohabitation with minorities, understood as groups historically discriminated against because of physical, cultural, or social characteristics. Research in this field has reported mixed findings. While a study conducted in Mexico indicates that cohabitation promotes IE (Gutiérrez & Huerta, 2024), a Spanish study found no significant relationships among university faculty (Llorent, Zych et al., 2020b). Furthermore, although research on university professors with disabilities remains limited, current evidence highlights the benefits of their inclusion, particularly in promoting a positive representation of disability, understood as an opportunity to enrich the attitudes of the entire academic community (Rodríguez-Martín & Álvarez-Arregui, 2015). Another relevant variable is belonging to ethnic-cultural minorities. Evidence suggests that the quality of intergroup contact may improve relationships between Chilean students who do and do not belong to minority groups (Salazar-Fernández & Saiz, 2024). More broadly, exposure to diversity within the university context has been associated with greater civic development, the promotion of democratic attitudes, the strengthening of academic competencies, and the reduction of negative beliefs toward diversity (Castelán-Cargile et al., 2019).

In the occupational domain, faculty members in the United States with training in IE or research experience in diversity demonstrate more favorable attitudes toward inclusion (Kyong-Ah et al., 2017). Similar results have been observed among Social and Legal Sciences faculty in Spain (Rodríguez-Martín & Álvarez-Arregui, 2015), while comparable findings have been reported in Ecuador in the field of medical education (Vélez-Calvo et al., 2019) and in Brazil among Exact Sciences faculty (Brunhara et al., 2019). Taken together, these findings suggest that disciplinary characteristics may influence how inclusive practices in higher education are conceived and developed. In this regard, identifying potential differences in IE dimensions according to fields of knowledge constitutes a key element for guiding improvement strategies within the university system (Llorent, Zych et al., 2020a). Nevertheless, empirical evidence regarding this phenomenon in the Ecuadorian context remains limited, highlighting the need to explore how certain sociodemographic and academic characteristics of university faculty may relate to the development of inclusive educational practices.

Teachers' social and emotional competencies and inclusive education

SEC constitute an integrated set of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and abilities aimed at achieving goals across different domains of life. In education, SEC are essential for addressing contextual challenges and promoting adaptive teaching competencies (Llorent, Zych et al., 2020b). Their impact extends beyond the individual level by improving classroom climate, academic performance (Durlak et al., 2011), cognitive and personal development (Llorent, González-Gómez, et al., 2020), and teaching performance (Garrido & Gaeta, 2016). SEC also facilitate inclusive processes (Fernández & Malvar, 2020). Among university faculty, they are associated with better inclusive practices and should therefore be integrated into teacher training programs (Varó-Millán, 2021). Overall, these findings demonstrate that SEC constitute a key factor in the development of inclusive teaching practices in higher education, underscoring the need for further analysis among university faculty.

Research on IE and SEC among university faculty remains limited despite their connection with inclusive values (Varó-Millán, 2021). In Ecuador, no previous studies have jointly analyzed IE and SEC or their impact on teaching practices. Their combined analysis is necessary because faculty SEC influence both the implementation of IE and the quality of the educational experience. Examining their relationship makes it possible to understand how teachers' emotional and relational dispositions translate into more equitable and parti-

cipatory environments. Evidence indicates that the institutional strengthening of both components is associated with better academic trajectories (Daly et al., 2018) and with practices consistent with inclusion in higher education (Varó-Millán, 2021). Their integrated analysis broadens current knowledge and guides training decisions and university policies.

This research is based on the Prosocial Classroom Model (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009), which posits that teachers' SEC are the primary factor in generating positive and inclusive classroom climates. The relationship between SEC and IE is not incidental but structural: teachers' capacity for emotional self-regulation and prosocial behavior determines their pedagogical resilience in the face of diversity, while simultaneously serving as a role model for students. The rationale of this study is grounded in the idea that these relationships are not isolated; rather, they form a system in which sociodemographic characteristics are related to SEC, and together they determine the level of IE consolidation.

The present study

Within this framework, the present study proposes two objectives: first, to analyze IE among university faculty and examine differences in its development according to sociodemographic, educational, and disciplinary variables; and second, to examine the relationship between SEC and IE among university faculty, as well as the contribution of SEC and sociodemographic variables to faculty IE.

Five hypotheses are proposed in the present study: 1) university faculty generally exhibit high levels of IE; 2) significant differences exist according to sociodemographic variables, such that younger faculty members, women, and those who coexist with minorities tend to show higher levels of IE; 3) faculty members with disabilities, those belonging to an ethnic-cultural minority, those with training in inclusion, or those reporting research experience demonstrate greater IE development compared to their peers; 4) faculty SEC levels are positively and significantly related to their IE levels, establishing a direct association between both variables; and 5) the sociodemographic variables studied and faculty SEC demonstrate significant explanatory capacity regarding their levels of IE.

Method

Participants

A total of 568 faculty members from two universities in Cuenca, Ecuador, participated in the study: one public university (226 professors; 19,000 students) and one private university (345 professors; 6,500 students), from a national population of 36,272 faculty members (Senescyt, 2018). Incidental sampling was used. After removing missing cases, 37% were women (n = 209) and 63% were men (n = 358), a proportion similar to that reported in Ecuadorian universities (39% and 61%, respectively). The mean age was 43.91 years (SD = 9.68; range 20-74). Of the participants, 98% were Ecuadorian and 2.3% were foreign nationals; 7.4% reported having a disability and 6.6% lived with individuals belonging to minority groups. Regarding academic areas, 32.4% belonged to Science and Technology and Civil Engineering; 18.8% to Philosophy, Psychology, and Hospitality; 18.1% to Administration, Economics, and Finance; 10% to Legal Sciences; 9.2% to Medicine; and 2.8% to Dentistry. Additionally, 50.7% had no training in IE, 19.6% had general training, and 29.7% had specific training in IE. Concerning research on diversity, 62.1% reported no experience; 18.8% little experience; 15.2% some experience; 3.0% considerable experience; and 0.9% extensive experience.

Instruments

The instrument included socio-occupational data: age, gender, nationality of participants and their parents, disability status, faculty or school of employment, level of training in IE (1 = *No training*, 2 = *General training*, and 3 = *Specific training in IE*), experience in diversity research (1 = *Little/none*, 2 = *Moderate*, and 3 = *Extensive*), and cohabitation with minorities (i.e., "Does any of the people you live with belong to a 'MINORITY' group?"; response options were dichotomous: 1 = *Yes* and 0 = *No*).

The *Inclusive Education Scale* (Llorent, Zych et al., 2020b) includes 29 Likert-type items (1 = *Strongly disagree* to 5 = *Strongly agree*), organized into three factors: attitudes toward IE (8 items; e.g., "I make my classes accessible to all types of students"; α = .91), institutional organization for IE (9 items; e.g., "My faculty takes minorities into account when organizing spaces"; α = .87), and inclusive didactics (12 items; e.g., "My training helps me respond to diversity"; α = .82). Overall internal consistency was α = .88.

The *Social and Emotional Competencies Questionnaire* (SEC-Q; Zych et al., 2018) consists of 16 Likert-type items (1 = *Strongly disagree* to 5 = *Strongly agree*) distributed across four factors: self-awareness (4 items; e.g., "I know how to name my emotions"; α = .71), self-management and motivation (3 items; e.g., "I know how to motivate myself"; α = .77), social awareness and prosocial behavior (6 items; e.g., "I usually listen actively"; α = .81), and responsible decision-making (3 items; e.g., "I tend to make decisions lightly"; α = .78). Total internal consistency was α = .89.

Procedure

The study was approved by the Research Committee of the Vice-Rectorate for Research at Universidad del Azuay, Ecuador (code 2018-0057). It was designed as a descriptive, cross-sectional, *ex post facto* study, using incidental sampling and a snowball technique. Data collection was conducted during the first semester of 2019, with dissemination through the vice-rectorates for research. The questionnaire was administered in person by trained surveyors after explaining the objectives and instructions. It included informed consent and guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality.

Data analysis

Reliability was estimated using Cronbach's alpha, and descriptive analyses were conducted. Comparative mean analyses were also performed. The assumption of homoscedasticity was previously evaluated using Levene's test. For comparisons between two groups, Student's *t*-test was used, or Welch's statistic in cases of heteroscedasticity. For comparisons among more than two groups, one-way ANOVA with Bonferroni post hoc contrasts was applied, or Welch's statistic and the Games-Howell post hoc test in cases of heteroscedasticity. Effect size was calculated using Cohen's d (95% CI). Pearson correlations were conducted, and predictive capacity was evaluated through linear regression, with IE as the dependent variable and the following independent variables: age, gender, cohabitation with minorities, disability, ethnic-cultural belonging, training in inclusion, macro-area, and SEC dimensions. An ethnic-cultural majority-minority variable was created by combining participants' and parents' nationality with belonging to Indigenous groups. Age was dichotomized ($0 \leq 47$ years and $1 > 47$ years), following Llorent, Zych et al. (2020a). The decision to establish this cut-off point was based on the notion that the life cycle and professional development reach a turning point at this stage, marking the beginning of a period of maturity and consolidation in both emotional regulation strategies and teaching identity. Analyses were performed using SPSS v.25.

Results

IE scores among university faculty

Table 1 presents the means and standard deviations obtained for the different dimensions of IE. The inclusive didactics dimension showed the highest scores.

Comparisons of faculty IE according to age, gender, and cohabitation with minorities

Age correlated positively with the dimension attitudes toward IE ($r = .11$, $p < .05$), institutional organization for IE ($r = .12$, $p < .01$), and the total score ($r = .12$, $p < .01$). In addition, the results of the comparative analyses between both age groups showed higher levels among older faculty members (> 47 years) in the dimensions of attitudes toward IE, inclusive didactics, and inclusive education, as well as in the total score (Table 2).

Regarding gender, significant differences were observed only in institutional organization for IE, with higher levels among men ($M_{men} = 33.44$, $SD = 7.79$ vs. $M_{women} = 31.94$, $SD = 8.47$; $t_{(558)} = 2.12$, $p < .05$; d = .19, 95% CI [0.01, 0.36]).

Regarding cohabitation with minorities, differences were found only in the dimension institutional organization for IE, showing higher levels among faculty members who did not cohabitate with minorities ($M_{yes\ cohab} = 29.67$, $SD = 9.9$; vs. $M_{no\ cohab} = 33.11$, $SD = 7.93$; $t_{(498)} = 2.03$, $p > .05$; $d = -.35$, 95% CI [-0.69, -0.02]).

Table 1

Mean scores for IE and its dimensions

	n	*M*	*SD*
Attitudes toward inclusive education	564	37.37	4.48
Institutional organization for inclusive education	561	32.87	8.07
Inclusive didactics	547	51.43	7.66
Inclusive education	542	121.64	14.8

Table 2

IE: comparison according to age group

	Age ≤ 47 *n* = 193	Age > 47 *n* = 356			
	M (*SD*)	*M* (*SD*)	*t*	*p*	*d* (95% CI)
Attitudes toward inclusive education	37.07 (4.87)	37.93 (3.61)	-2.37	.018	-0.21 (0.39. -0.03)
Institutional organization for inclusive education	32.35 (8.01)	33.84 (8.12)	-2.09	.037	-0.18 (-0.36. -0.01)
Inclusive didactics	51.27 (8.03)	51.7 (6.95)	-0.63	.532	-0.07 (-0.25. 0.11)
Inclusive education	120.62 (15.89)	123.53 (12.33)	-2.19	.029	-0.21 (-0.39. -0.04)

Comparisons of faculty IE according to disability and ethnic-cultural group belonging

The variable disability status showed no significant differences for any of the dimensions (attitudes toward IE: $t_{(560)} = 0.7$, $p = .98$; inclusive didactics: $t_{(543)} = -0.17$, $p = .58$; institutional organization for IE: $t_{(557)} = 1.14$, $p = .09$) nor for the full scale ($t_{(538)} = 0.75$, $p = .57$).

Differences between the ethnic-cultural majority and minority groups were analyzed, and significant differences were found in the dimension institutional organization for IE ($t_{(559)} = 2.57$, $p = .02$; $d = -.21$; 95% CI [-0.4, -0.03]). Faculty members belonging to an ethnic-cultural minority obtained higher scores ($M_{maj} = 31.79$, $SD = 8.56$; vs. $M_{min} = 33.57$, $SD = 7.68$).

Comparisons of IE according to IE training and experience in diversity research

Differences regarding level of training were found only in the dimension attitudes toward IE (see Table 3). The Games-Howell post hoc test showed a significantly higher mean in the group with general training compared to the group with no training ($d = 0.33$, 95% CI [0.11, 0.56]) and the group with specific training ($d = 0.37$, 95% CI [0.13, 0.62]). The results of the comparisons for the variable experience in diversity research showed no differences among the different levels.

Comparison of IE according to macro-area of knowledge

Faculty members from the macro-areas of Legal Sciences and Medicine showed higher levels in the dimension attitudes toward IE. Furthermore, faculty members from the Medicine macro-area also showed higher levels on the full scale, with sig-

Table 3

Comparisons according to IE training

	None $n = 269$	General $n = 107$	Specific $n = 164$	
	M (*SD*)	*M* (*SD*)	*M* (*SD*)	F
Attitudes toward inclusive education	37.32 (4.09)	38.55 (2.41)	36.97 (5.12)	4.95*
Institutional organization for inclusive education	32.6 (7.76)	32.91 (7.44)	33.66 (8.65)	0.9
Inclusive didactics	50.94 (7.79)	51.23 (6.05)	52.72 (7.79)	2.96
Inclusive education	120.88 (14.19)	122.75 (10.74)	123.17 (15.77)	1.53

* $p < .01$.

Table 4

IE according to macro-area of knowledge

	1 $n = 107$	2 $n = 49$	3 $n = 103$	4 $n = 57$	5 $n = 182$	6 $n = 47$	7 $n = 16$			
	M (*SD*)	*M* (*SD*)	*M* (*SD*)	*M* (*SD*)	*M* (*SD*)	*M* (*SD*)	*M* (*SD*)	*F*	*p*	Diff.
Attitudes toward inclusive education	37.2 (4.63)	36.51 (3.55)	37.78 (4.24)	34.49 (6.09)	37.99 (3.72)	39.26 (2.23)	35.5 (8.02)	6.50a	<.001	6-1, 6-2, 6-4, 4-2, 4-5
Institutional organization for inclusive education	31.84 (8.64)	32.98 (8.06)	31.43 (7.3)	32.82 (8.52)	33.83 (7.43)	35.19 (8.51)	31.75 (11.33)	1.72	.1	-
Inclusive didactics	51.55 (8.18)	52.25 (5.11)	49.51 (8.37)	50.61 (8.68)	51.59 (6.59)	53.51 (7.16)	55.19 (11.67)	2.12	.05	-
Inclusive education	120.7 (16.14)	121.63 (10.7)	118.8 (14.33)	117.86 (17.82)	123.24 (12.23)	128.02 (13.59)	122.44 (26.99)	2.55a	.02	6-3, 6-4

Note.a: Welch's ANOVA and Games–Howell. 1: Philosophy, Psychology, and Hospitality Sciences; 2: Design, Architecture, and Arts; 3: Administration, Economics, and Finance; 4: Legal Sciences; 5: Science and Technology, Civil Engineering; 6: Medicine; 7: Dentistry.

nificantly higher scores compared to faculty members from the macro-areas of Administration, Economics, and Finance, and Legal Sciences (see Table 4).

SEC scores among university faculty

Means and standard deviations of the different SEC dimensions were analyzed. For this variable, social awareness and prosocial behavior were the dimension with the highest scores (see Table 5).

Comparison of faculty SEC according to sociodemographic characteristics

The relationship between sociodemographic variables and faculty SEC development was analyzed. Comparative analyses between the two age groups showed significantly higher levels in the dimensions of self-management and motivation, and social awareness and prosocial behavior, as well as in total SEC levels among faculty older than 47 years (see Table A1 in the Appendices). Differences were also identified in the dimension self-management and motivation when analyzing cohabitation with minorities ($t_{(514)} = -2.43$, $p = .04$; $d = 0.35$, 95% CI [0.06, 0.64]). Higher levels were found among faculty members who did not live with minorities ($M_{yes} = 12.69$, $SD = 2.44$; versus $M_{no} = 13.54$, $SD = 1.82$). According to macro-area of knowledge, faculty members from Legal Sciences, Science and Technology, Civil Engineering, Medicine, and Dentistry showed significantly higher SEC performance compared to faculty members from the macro-area of Design, Architecture, and Arts (see Table A2 in the Appendices). Finally, no statistically significant differences were found for any dimension when comparing social and emotional competencies according to gender, disability status, belonging to an ethnic-cultural minority, general or specific IE training, or level of experience in diversity research.

Relationship between IE and SEC

Table 6 presents the correlations between IE and SEC, evidence of a positive and significant association among all dimensions.

Predictive characteristics of IE

The linear regression model was statistically significant ($R^2 = .16$, $F = 9.11$, $p < .001$). Table 7 shows that social awareness and prosocial behavior emerged as the main positive predictor of IE, although training in inclusion showed an inverse explanatory contribution.

Table 5

Mean scores for SEC and their dimensions

	n	*M*	*SD*
Self-awareness	564	16.96	2.72
Self-management and motivation	562	13.43	1.9
Social awareness and prosocial behavior	562	25.65	3.46
Responsible decision-making	564	13.16	2.08
Socio-emotional competencies	560	69.19	8.2

Table 6

Correlations between SEC and IE

	1	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	*6*	*7*	*8.*
2	.23*							
3	.31*	.29*						
4	.59*	.77*	.77*					
5	.25*	.04	.14*	.17*				
6	.28*	.14*	.19*	.26*	.53*			
7	.34*	.24*	.34*	.42*	.5*	.6*		
8	.27*	.2*	.26*	.33*	.5*	.49*	.62*	
9	.36*	.2*	.3*	.38*	.78*	.77*	.88*	.81*

Note. 1 = Attitudes toward inclusive education; 2 = Institutional organization for inclusive education; 3 = Inclusive didactics; 4 = Inclusive education; 5 = Self-awareness; 6 = Self-management and motivation; 7 = Social awareness and prosocial behavior; 8 = Responsible decision-making; 9 = Socio-emotional competencies.
* $p < .01$.

Table 7

Predictive characteristics of inclusive education

	B	SE	β	*t*	*p*
Age	0.12	0.07	.081	1.88	.06
Gender	-0.38	1.29	-.013	-0.29	.771
Cohabitation with a minority	-1.4	1.49	-.04	-0.94	.348
Ethnic-cultural group	-2.45	1.25	-.083	-1.96	.051
Training in inclusion	-2.15	0.71	-.131	-3.05	.002
Macro-area of knowledge	0.53	0.35	.068	1.53	.126
Self-awareness	-0.5	0.28	-.092	-1.82	.069
Self-management and motivation	0.07	0.42	.009	0.16	.87
Social awareness and prosocial behavior	1.34	0.25	.321	5.65	< .001
Responsible decision-making	0.53	0.35	.076	1.51	.131

Discussion

The study analyzed IE among Ecuadorian university faculty, considering sociodemographic variables. The first hypothesis proposed a high level of IE, which was confirmed: both the total score and its dimensions exceeded the theoretical mean. Furthermore, the overall value was higher than that reported in previous studies, such as the one conducted in Spain using the same instrument (Llorent, Zych et al., 2020a). These findings suggest a favorable perception of inclusion among Ecuadorian faculty, possibly associated with recent processes of awareness-raising, regulatory development, and legislation in higher education. Despite this, many universities in Ecuador, independently and through their institutional autonomy, have had to rethink educational practice by generating inclusive actions and internal policies to respond to students' needs. This institutional response is essential because, although national policies have expanded access, institutional practices do not always achieve full consolidation or development from a comprehensive perspective (Aguilera, 2022).

The second proposed hypothesis was not confirmed. Regarding age, IE was positively associated with older faculty members, suggesting that experience may strengthen responses to diversity, as well as professional maturity (Llorent, Zych et al., 2020b). Concerning gender, men scored higher in institutional organization for IE, in contrast to previous studies that found no differences (Tárraga-Mínguez et al., 2020) or reported higher levels among women (Rodríguez-Martín & Álvarez-Arregui, 2015). This result may reflect a more favorable perception linked to men's greater presence in management positions, as those individuals may tend to evaluate less critically the structures, they themselves coordinate or represent. Cohabitation with minorities showed that institutional organization related to IE was evaluated more positively by those who did not maintain direct interaction with these groups. This result may be explained by the fact that individuals who do not experience diversity in their immediate environment tend to perceive the administrative decisions and actions implemented as adequate. In fact, it has been suggested that direct experience with diversity allows for the development of a more critical perspective regarding organizational shortcomings (Llorent, Zych et al., 2020b). In Ecuador, certain historically excluded groups, such as Indigenous faculty and students, report having been subjected to structural discrimination (Arias et al., 2025). Consequently, faculty members who coexist with minorities may consider that the mere presence of diversity within university spaces is insufficient; rather, interaction, active participation, and learning must also be promoted (Torres, 2019).

The third hypothesis was partially confirmed. Regarding disability status, no differences were identified in any dimension of IE. In previous studies, faculty members with physical disabilities made limited references to inclusion, specific training, and the adaptation of classrooms and materials (Dvir, 2015). This pattern suggests that the personal experience of disability does not guarantee a more inclusive stance. Instead, it may reflect the internalization of a traditional educational model that normalizes homogeneity and limits expectations for institutional transformation. Regarding belonging to ethnic-cultural minorities, it was found that faculty members belonging to ethnic-cultural minorities scored higher in institutional organization for IE, although no differences were found in the other dimensions. This indicates that the organizational component is perceived as the most developed area within Ecuadorian universities, positioning institutional structure as the visible axis of inclusion. However, its real effectiveness depends on its translation into concrete actions rather than solely formal declarations (Moriña & Carballo, 2018). This finding is critical, as it suggests that although normative frameworks and organizational structures are recognized by minority faculty members, these have not yet been reflected with the same intensity in personal attitudes or teaching practices, which require intentional strengthening to move beyond mere administrative management.

Regarding training in inclusion, differences were found in faculty attitudes toward IE. Specifically, faculty members with general training showed higher levels than those with no tra-

ining or only specific training. This suggests an evolutionary effect: basic knowledge may promote attitudinal adherence, whereas more in-depth training fosters critical perspectives regarding the limitations of the system. In Ecuador, faculty responses to diversity remain insufficient, partly due to training gaps (Lara et al., 2024). These results highlight the importance of guaranteeing continuous training that articulates knowledge, attitudes, and concrete practices in favor of inclusion within the university community. Finally, experience in diversity research was not associated with differences in IE, thus rejecting the proposed hypothesis. Although other studies have linked such experience to more inclusive practices (Llorent, Zych et al., 2020b), in this study these understandings do not yet appear to be fully integrated into faculty beliefs and perspectives. In addition, this study found better IE outcomes among faculty members in the macro-area of Medicine, consistent with previous findings (Vélez-Calvo et al., 2019). These results may suggest a possible shift in medical education toward a model that incorporates better inclusive practices. However, it should be noted that this degree program does not usually include students with disabilities (Vélez-Calvo et al., 2019), which may limit the interpretation of these findings. In this sense, it is possible that these evaluations reflect a superficial perception of inclusion, due to the absence of direct experiences that would allow educational practices to be contrasted in real contexts involving students with disabilities.

Regarding sociodemographic variables, age (especially among individuals older than 47 years) correlated positively with Self-management and motivation, Social awareness, and prosocial behavior. Previous studies have also identified greater Self-management and motivation skills among older faculty members (Llorent, Zych et al., 2020a), who may foster harmonious, empathetic, and safe educational climates, thereby contributing to inclusive processes (Maamari & Majdalani, 2019).

Cohabitation with minorities was associated with lower levels of Self-management and motivation; scores were higher among those who did not live with these groups. This finding may indicate that direct experience with diversity exposes tensions and demands that are not always institutionally recognized, thereby affecting perceptions of personal resources available to manage them. Regarding macro-areas, faculty members in Medicine and Dentistry obtained higher scores in self-management and motivation, social awareness-prosocial behavior, and overall SEC. This difference may be explained by the recent shift toward the systematic incorporation of SEC in these programs, driven by the demands of contemporary professional practice (Leo et al., 2019). This suggests a process of curricular updating with noticeable effects on faculty members.

The fourth hypothesis of the study proposed that faculty SEC levels are positively associated with their IE levels, consistent with the theoretical framework of this study and previous research findings (Fernández & Malvar, 2020; Llorent & Núñez-Flores, 2023). Faculty members with more highly developed SEC are more likely to identify the learning difficulties experienced by their students. At the same time, these faculty members may show greater capacity to address the challenges of diversity, becoming more effective in the design and implementation of educational responses.

Finally, the last hypothesis proposed that sociodemographic variables and faculty SEC would demonstrate significant explanatory capacity regarding faculty IE. The findings empirically support the Prosocial Classroom Model by confirming that inclusion is not a purely technical process but a relational one, identifying social awareness and prosocial behavior as the dimension with the greatest positive explanatory impact on IE. At the same time, teacher training operated as a factor with a smaller and inverse explanatory impact, suggesting that greater specialization increases faculty critical awareness and methodological demands toward institutional environments. Social awareness and prosocial behavior, understood as empathetic responses to the environment (Caprara et al., 2005), are associated with greater altruism, empathy, and well-being in contexts of diversity (Mieres-Chacaltana et al., 2019).

Limitations and practical implications

The study presents two main limitations. First, although the sample was large, it was limited to two universities in Cuenca, restricting the generalizability of the results. Second, despite the observed predictive capacity, longitudinal designs are required to confirm and expand these findings. Another limitation of the study is the use of self-report instruments, which may introduce biases associated with social desirability in participants' responses.

Regarding the practical implications of the study, the results highlight two priorities for university faculty: on the one hand, strengthening training in IE and SEC with an applied emphasis; and on the other hand, intentionally promoting the social and emotional development of students. This requires the systematic integration of these competencies into the curriculum, beyond isolated individual initiatives.

Conclusions

This study argues that Ecuadorian university faculty possess a predominantly favorable perception of IE. The findings identified social awareness and prosocial behavior as the principal SEC factor associated with higher levels of IE development. Ultimately, it is concluded that achieving effective inclusion requires moving beyond formal declarations through continuous and applied training that systematically integrates SEC into both the curriculum and university culture.

Author contributions

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Conflict of interests

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interests.

Declaración de disponibilidad de datos

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author.

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Annex

Table A1

Comparison of SEC levels according to age group

	Age ≤ 47 *n* = 193	Age >47 *n* = 357			
	M (*SD*)	*M* (*SD*)	*t*	*p*	*d* (95% CI)
Self-awareness	16.85 (2.78)	17.17 (2.59)	-1.355	.176	-0.12 (-0.30. 0.06)
Self- management and motivation	13.28 (1.99)	13.70 (1.71)	-2.507	.012	-0.23 (-0.41. -0.06)
Social-awareness and prosocial behavior	25.4 (3.72)	26.12 (2.87)	-2.552	.011	-0.23 -0.4. -0.5
Responsible decision-making	13.04 (2.187)	13.37 (1.87)	-1.754	.08	-0.17 (-0.34. -0.01)
Socio and emotional competencies	68.57 (8.75)	70.34 (6.96)	-2.45	.015	-0.23 (-0.41. -0.06)

Table A2

Comparison of SEC levels according to macro-area of knowledge

	1 *n* = 107	2 *n* = 49	3 *n* = 103	4 *n* = 57	5 *n* = 182	6 *n* = 47	7 *n* = 16			
	M (SD)	*M (SD)*	*M (SD)*	*M (SD)*	*M (SD)*	*M (SD)*	*M (SD)*	*F*	*p*	Differences
Self-awareness	16.93 (3.17)	16.1 (2.52)	17.02 (2.54)	17.23 (3.12)	17.09 (2.41)	17.09 (2.46)	17.75 (2.74)	2.32a	.28	-
Self-management and motivation	13.06 (2.26)	12.73 (1.97)	13.57 (1.75)	13.30 (2.39)	13.6 (1.54)	14 (1.56)	14.31 (1.54)	3.03a	<.01	6-2 7-2
Social awareness and prosocial behavior	25.67 (3.46)	24.2 (3.45)	25.33 (3.14)	25.05 (5.2)	25.88 (2.85)	27.13 (2.97)	28.25 (2.38)	7.25	<.001	6-2 7-2 7-3 7-4
Responsible decision-making	13.05 (2.2)	13.14 (1.58)	12.93 (2.21)	12.91 (2.57)	13.28 (1.93)	13.45 (2.14)	14.13 (1.26)	1.07	.38	-
Social and emotional competencies	68.7 (8.95)	66.18 (7.31)	68.85 (7.45)	68.49 (12.11)	69.84 (6.65)	71.66 (7.43)	74.74 (6.36)	4.68a	<.001	5-2 6-2 7-2

Note. a: Welch's ANOVA and Games–Howell. 1: Philosophy, Psychology, and Hospitality Sciences. 2: Design, Architecture, and Arts. 3: Administration, Economics, and Finance. 4: Legal Sciences. 5: Science and Technology, Civil Engineering. 6: Medicine. 7: Dentistry.