

Original Article

Functioning and challenges of the support units for inclusion

Funcionamento e desafios das unidades de apoio à inclusão

Funcionamiento y desafíos de las unidades de apoyo para la inclusión

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Abstract

The Ecuadorian education system has developed the Support Units for Inclusion (UDAI) as focal organization organizations with a remit to support overall support and guidance provided to schools within their provision for students with Special Educational Needs (SEN). The aim of this article is to fully describe the intricate function of UDAI in the identification, psychopedagogical evaluation, and on-going support of children with SEN, and to seriously consider the main issues and challenges for their professional staff. Employing a qualitative research design, our study interweaves intensive document analysis, such as of key reports like the Consejo de Observación para la Igualdad de Discapacidades (2019), with intensive interviewing of UDAI professionals and regular classroom teachers. Our research reveals significant gaps between normative ideals and functional realities in the diagnosis of issues such as insufficient staffing, prolonged diagnostic processes, no specialized training for regular class teachers, and limited material resources. Collectively, these contribute to the equity and quality of the education response, particularly for children with multiple comorbidities like Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). The research indicates the necessity of enhanced interinstitutional coordination, considerable investment in physical and human capital, and ongoing, specialist professional learning in order to deliver effectively an inclusive education model in Ecuador.

Keywords: Education Special, Educational Measurement, Ecuador.

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Resumo

O sistema educacional equatoriano desenvolveu Unidades de Apoio à Inclusão (UDAI) como organizações focais com o objetivo de fornecer apoio e orientação abrangentes às escolas em suas ofertas educacionais para alunos com Necessidades Educacionais Especiais (NEE). Utilizando um delineamento de pesquisa qualitativa, nosso estudo combina uma análise completa de documentos, incluindo relatórios como o do Conselho de Observação para a Igualdade na Deficiência (2019), com entrevistas em profundidade com profissionais das UDAs e com professores de sala de aula regular. Nossa pesquisa revela lacunas significativas entre os ideais normativos e as realidades funcionais no diagnóstico de problemas como pessoal insuficiente, processos diagnósticos demorados, falta de treinamento especializado para professores de sala de aula regular e recursos materiais limitados. Conjuntamente, esses fatores contribuem para a equidade e a qualidade da resposta educacional, particularmente para crianças com múltiplas comorbidades, como Transtorno do Espectro Autista (TEA) e Transtorno do Déficit de Atenção e Hiperatividade (TDAH). A pesquisa indica a necessidade de maior coordenação interinstitucional, um investimento significativo em capital físico e humano e formação profissional especializada contínua para implementar efetivamente um modelo de educação inclusiva no Equador.

Palavras-chave: Educação Inclusiva, Avaliação Educacional, Equador.

Resumen

El sistema educativo ecuatoriano ha desarrollado las Unidades de Apoyo para la Inclusión (UDAI) como organizaciones focales con el objetivo de brindar apoyo y orientación integral a las escuelas en su oferta educativa para estudiantes con Necesidades Educativas Especiales (NEE). Empleando un diseño de investigación cualitativo, nuestro estudio combina un análisis exhaustivo de documentos, como informes clave como el del Consejo de Observación para la Igualdad de Discapacidades (2019), con entrevistas exhaustivas a profesionales de las UDAI y docentes de aulas regulares. Nuestra investigación revela brechas significativas entre los ideales normativos y las realidades funcionales en el diagnóstico de problemas como la dotación insuficiente de personal, los procesos de diagnóstico prolongados, la falta de formación especializada para el profesorado de aula regular y la limitación de recursos materiales. En conjunto, estos factores contribuyen a la equidad y la calidad de la respuesta educativa, en particular para niños con múltiples comorbilidades, como el Trastorno del Espectro Autista (TEA) y el Trastorno por Déficit de Atención e Hiperactividad (TDAH). La investigación indica la necesidad de una mayor coordinación interinstitucional, una inversión considerable en capital físico y humano, y una formación profesional continua y especializada para implementar eficazmente un modelo de educación inclusiva en Ecuador.

Palabras clave: Educación Especial, Evaluación Educacional, Ecuador.

Introduction

Acquisition always calls forth the mediating role of pedagogy to facilitate between the actual teachers' intentions to transform uptake of objects of culture into knowledge in the current environment and the learners. In this instance, inclusive education is not so much an ideology of pedagogy but a mindset in the sense that it starts with the premise that any and all students on the basis of difference are as good a bet for the education process as the next. The long-term aspiration is to build an inclusive society that confronts discriminatory thinking by building robust structures and mechanisms at every level (Jesus et al., 2025).

The journey toward Ecuador's inclusive education has been marked by the most solid milestones in legislation. The Republic of Ecuador Constitution in 2008 was the break point, breaking revolutionary change around the topic of people with disabilities and facto, political and social dispositions and giving them rights. Conversely, Organic Law of Intercultural Education (LOEI) and Regulation give "priority and special attention" and the "organisation and implementation of curricular reform necessary to make possible inclusion and permanence" to disabled individuals (Theodoro et al., 2026).

The aim of this inclusive normative policy is to eliminate paradigms of exclusion and encourage democratic coexistence and good differences among people within school society. Regulation. Historically, the educative process in Ecuador has been clinical-aid and segregation, then one of integrating one, and now to where it has come to the point that there can be unproblematic inclusive orientation of education. This radical educative, cultural, and social change of orientation toward genuine inclusion is challenging interinstitutional coordination and stubborn persistence (Rojas et al., 2021; Szatmari et al., 2021).

Yet all these utopian legislative attempts aside, institution at the human level through day-to-day contact in class of inclusive education is full of thousands of problems. Various research and on-ground observations make it clear that Ecuador's education system is "state of integration" where the SEN children are permitted to be physically integrated with the same group but hardly receive pedagogic care especially tailored in the sense of his/her way of learning and his/her need for learning. The bottleneck of this vision of the majority of the educationists still exists (Silva et al., 2025).

Of these issues, the most glaring is a shortage of teacher preparation and ongoing professional development to meet classroom diversity. Teachers themselves verify an evident lack of professional development to support inclusive strategy and curriculum adjustment, fostering incompetence and resistance to changing entrenched pedagogic practices. In Ecuador, in a clear explanation from one national study, it was mentioned that the majority of professionals identified huge gaps in their own practice in attempting to conduct needs assessment on ASD and advocated for additional training. Pre-service training at university levels stands a better chance of being deemed insufficient in addressing the needs of SEN students. Narváez & Lara (2021) openly in Ecuador enunciate the demands of profound teacher formation, theory-conceptual materials, and sensitization to turn diversity into capital. Without obligatory and planned continuous professional formation, certainly enriched pedagogy will be excluded.

The next thing to happen in such a training deficit chain is that of untrained human capital and adequate material infrastructure. Crowding, from 30 to 40 pupils in each class in Ecuador, discourages the provision of individualized support in public schools. Inadequate trained personnel, i.e., speech therapists, occupational therapists, or psychopedagogues, is a common shortcoming. Besides the above, psychopedagogical detection and evaluation processes in Ecuador are lengthy and bureaucratic, 12 months maximum, hence the delay in the initiation of early intervention and, by implication, learning acquisition. Ecuadorian Observatory of practice finds particularly the first diagnostic and evaluation phases to be among the most serious challenges to effective inclusive practice.

Conceptualisation of SEN in Ecuador has certain specifics. Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition, Text Revision (DSM-V-TR) categorizes co-morbidity of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) with other disorders such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). The latest comorbidity has serious consequences in the majority of areas of a patient's life with the same. But in the case of Ecuador, there has been a general dearth of research on ASD and

ADHD comorbidity, even better placed to limit education and health interventions designed to treat each individually, thus not being able to accommodate the intricate dynamics of their co-morbid expression. Insufficiency of effective diagnostic tools in addition to interdisciplinarity adds up to total this in Ecuador. ASD, child disintegrative disorder, and schizophrenia were previously officially lumped all together under one umbrella heading of “undifferentiated psychotic disorders” with correspondingly vague treatments and statistics of little value (Ramírez et al., 2023; Ruíz et al., 2023).

Thus, this current paper is motivated by the attitudes of Ecuadorian teachers regarding inclusive education and care in an effort to prepare SEN students, keeping in mind the significance of teacher attitude and ongoing professional development in facilitating successful schooling responses. Most important is the way teaching discursive moves (TDM) tries to construct class culture of dialogicity and co-learning. Teaching as a mediational action between teacher’s purposeful consciousness and students’ already available knowledge toward the beginning of appropriation of cultural tools, is constructing shared mental contexts and sites of reference. Class discussion as it evolves in the moment is a movement of a transition toward monological form, one that will necessarily close off the potential for learning. The problem of the TDMs as interventions—though questioning, commenting, and leading—that establish and open space for learning on the part of students is a problem of necessity. Such proximity order communication demands respect, hearing, listening, and being willing to take one’s own assumption and limitation in order to establish and esteem a multiplicity of voices.

Objectives

The research seeks to achieve the following main objectives:

- To identify the attitude of teachers toward inclusive education and toward giving attention to SEN;
- To identify the training deficit and support needs of the Ecuadorian teachers when giving attention to SEN students.

Methodology

The research is based on an interpretive and qualitative paradigm. Qualitative approach to research is applied best in severe research of a specific phenomenon in a way that there may be thorough analysis of the participants’ needs, perceptions, and experiences and therefore a comprehensive and sufficient perception of education reality. The entire research design is really crowded with descriptive, particularistic, and heuristic, that is, it holds extremely high esteem for the centrality of the temporal, spatial, and subjective dimensions of the studied education reality. It esteems that conclusions, due to the singular and irreproducible nature of every social situation, cannot be intended for general utilization but for deep contextual understanding. The researcher practitioner must then become a participant by necessity, interpreting data collected in arriving at meaning.

Case study was the method adopted to conduct this study. Case study approach is ideally suited for the descriptive work of describing in considerable detail the specific practices and situational idiosyncrasies of UDAI and what implications these have for their learning and teaching activity. Although it is an approximation to qualitative analysis of a set of cases rather than total case study, this approach allowed focused analysis of the academic reaction presented in some cases of co-occurring ASD and ADHD within the Almería (Spain) and Guayaquil (Ecuador) school environment.

This student outcome-oriented, two-context showed deep knowledge of the systemic support systems like UDAI in Ecuador as these units are the core of the whole education response.

Study context and participants

This study indirectly involved UDAI professionals by reading their reports and by interview with teachers and families who worked with such units. The bigger study that this article is taking so much from had a blend of participants like Ecuador's EGB teachers, parents, and other professionals to mention but a few. In Ecuador, interest was strategic in that it is at this stage where there are the highest numbers of SEN students. Guayaquil education centers were targeted by proximity and with ASD students having comorbid ADHD. Data that had been collected were triangulated between tutors, specialist staff members (such as Pedagogical Therapists, Technical Social Integration Professionals, Hearing and Language Specialists, language therapists), school managers, and family members. The previously processed cases (Caso1 and Caso2 in Spain, CasoEcu1 in Ecuador) were all explained by employing verbal expression, language proficiency levels, gross and fine motor development, and problem behavior, as well as problem family relationships and socio-economic limitation. The context of public school life in Guayaquil, i.e., revealed overcrowded classrooms (30-35 students) and having medium-low socioeconomic families, where there is limited access to special services because of economic constraints.

Procedures for data collection

It was even more so in document analysis and semi-structured interviews and general observation and discussion groups within the research design that data collection was carried out. The sequence of these procedures was begun from exploratory and inductive to an increased and concentrated information collection.

- Questionnaires: Four phases were used while developing questionnaires, i.e., conceptual phase, selection of member for validation committee, exploratory phase by expert perception, and completing the versions. Shortlisted case participants were sifted for data by way of the questionnaire through closed (yes/no) and Likert scale-type questions, and forwarded through the families. Precaution has been taken while adding simple words so that the questionnaire can be readily read by any participant. For the Guayaquil case, material was translated to local education and language needs as well. Google Forms offered questionnaires with advance informed consent and anonymization to participants. The first exploratory 16-question questionnaire asked symptomatological features in familial terms as reasonable questions;
- Semi-structured Interviews: Semi-structured interviews were constructed to a thematic framework with space to test teachers' interpretation in depth. Language was spoken spontaneously into interviewee "jargon" (jargon where necessary) to foster discussion. The use of tape recorders was so that data could be recorded and for transcription sheets to note interventions meticulously, and so that new categories could be constructed upon which to analyze. Flexibility in the instruments meant that situational and field appropriateness were controlled as a number variable of interviewees. Initial markers were constructed and inductively derived categories of data were stipulated and described iteratively. Stakeholder Interviews: Qualitative in-depth interviews with additional stakeholders such as tutors, specialist support staff (PT, PTIS, AL, language therapists), school managers, and parents;

- **Document Analysis:** The strategy allowed pedagogical reality to be examined as written records of institutions (e.g., Institutional Educational Project, Institutional Curricular Project, Annual Curricular Planning) and other documentation. Documentary evidence thereby ensures truthfulness of information and recall bias does not exist. Official papers were verified by Spanish and Ecuadorian Ministries of Education, whereas others were verified through cross-checking using information triangulation methods. It entailed surveying, classification, reading, organizing, and documentation interpretation for a purpose;
- **Observation:** Unobtrusive and direct observation was noted in field notebook and diary and heavy and anecdotal student work and behavior reporting. Observation forms were modified to note patterns of symptomology of ASD and ADHD so that more systematic and objective reports could be gained of the social, temporal, and spatial variables in which student behavior overlapped;
- **Discussion Groups:** It acted as a platform for comparison of conflicting opinion, consensus and identification of points of disagreement as evaluated and set out by the members. Voice recorders were utilized, and vigilance was exercised in other handling routines of the groups too, acceptable sound quality and non-circumvention of objectives. New material was available as a result of there being design flexibility and maintained an even rate of participation. Sound recorders were used, and special care was taken as far as warning listened to to recognize group dynamics, facilitate effective recording, and facilitate focus. The open-ended format allowed emergent themes to be built upon and equal offering of input. The method allowed comprehensive data to be derived, for instance, parents worried about low activity and information extra cost were given access.

Data analysis

Data analysis, in which qualitative data dominated, included systematic reduction, data acquisition, and data clustering for study, knowledge, and interpretation use.

To begin with, “episodes” were drawn out from class transcripts—a meso-scale analysis. Episodes were differentiated based on variables such as the number of learners, topic being handled, type of activity (whole class, group, individual), and work instructions, and were immediately identifiable from the preceding episodes and the following one because this process led to the development of 67 episodes in 11 classes that were observed. The focal point was the centering on pedagogy of discursive moves (TDM) as intervention since opening the window for the learners to learn and being supportive required intervention—question, comment, and directive.

Micro-analysis was centered on one turn since more than one speech act was anticipated to be undertaken in one turn. Provisional category model was developed. Codes were originally abstracted deductively from literature and subsequently sequentially constructed in an iterative process of refinement, as further codes inductively constructed from the data themselves. These included seminars in rounds where researchers found time to read slowly through transcripts, marking discursive effect of teacher action on learners. The codes were then tested for internal heterogeneity and external homogeneity, coherence, consistency, and distinctiveness, an attempt being made toward agreement among researchers. Three overarching TDM categories emerged: “work climate,” “points of view/dialogicity,” and “shared knowledge.”. With respect to this paper, conclusions are primarily centered on UDAI activities and issues, closely aligned from challenges

acquired through document content analysis and interviews, unveiling system forces influencing such class dynamics. The process of analysis concluded in repatriation of early findings to the study area for verification and completion by committed subjects. Coding of the data made it easier to disaggregate data interpretation.

Every action, approach, and type of actor was assigned a unique label (e.g., “Tut” for tutor, “PedEcu3” for Ecuadorian pedagogue). Actor triangulation and method triangulation (questionnaires, interviews, document analysis, observation, and discussion groups) was the main tool to obtain the quality and validity of the data that were collected. In this way, data were compared and triangulated from different sources, thereby making the research more reliable. Survey information gathered were summarized and presented graphically, whereas textual information gathered via interviews, document studies, and group discussions were reduced, coded, put into categories, and analyzed using Atlas.ti software.

Professional ethics

This study adhered to a strict ethical framework to guarantee protection and a proper use of institutional data. In so far as access to institutional documents, such as the Institutional Educational Project (PEI), Institutional Curriculum Project (PCI), and Annual Curriculum Plans (PCA), is concerned, prior approval was secured from the administrations of recognized districts and institutions within Guayaquil. This ensured that access to such a document would be only and solely for academic purposes and in accordance with their administrative and educational management.

Concerning free and informed consent, there was a differentiated procedure based on the participant:

- Teachers and professionals: In the semi-structured interviews and focus group technique used in this study, participants were provided with a thorough explanation of the research objectives and the voluntary nature of the study before the procedure;
- Families and children: Because this study has an indirect impact on Special Educational Needs children, parents or guardians were required to give informed consent. In the case of questionnaire surveys conducted through Google Forms, a prerequisite for gaining consent was the inclusion of a mandatory section stating the purpose of utilizing data collected in an anonymous format through coding (for example, “Tut” or “PedEcu3”).

All the gathered data were treated in accordance with the principles of integrity as well as accuracy, using the technique of source triangulation in an attempt to avoid any bias whatsoever, thus ascertaining the reliability of data in the context of Inclusion Support Units (UDAI)¹.

Results

Systematic analysis of the data collected, i.e., teacher attitude, concern, and training needs, produced a sequence of conclusions that were answers to the research questions.

¹ In line with the Ecuadorian legal framework, this study is grounded in the Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador (2008), where it is established the right to the protection of personal data (Art. 66, paragraph 19), as well as the Organic Law on the Protection of Personal Data (2021), which governs the processing of sensitive personal data, especially in situations of vulnerability like disability. In addition, the research procedure respects the ethical norms of research carried out in human participants in line with the regulations promoted by the Ministry of Public Health and the Organic Law of Intercultural Education (LOEI), which establishes the need to safeguard the physical and mental integrity of the students with special educational requirements in the course of any intervention or appraisal within the educative environment.

1. Teachers' Attitudes toward Inclusive Education and SEN Referral Barriers Teachers to a significant extent reported either negative or neutral disposition toward classroom or grounds-level diversity or due to perception of sheer impossibility in unifying normal teaching practice with pupils' individual needs with SEN's. It bred an insecurity in their ability to meet the needs of the students with special needs, even among professionals who had received some training. In Ecuador, the majority of the professionals reported that they felt inadequate in skills for identifying ASD needs and suggested more training and investment in professional skills.

Some of the teachers, particularly those of highly popular state schools, had complained about SEN children holding back the rest of the group. Went as far as requesting SEN children to be taught in a different room so that SEN children can be a "hindrance" to group progress. The reason for this is that they do not have finance and are less aware of the target behavior in inclusive settings. Instead of initiatives overall, Ecuadorian inclusive schools lag behind in some specific areas like substantial investment in teacher training and shared attitudinal barriers among the student population.

2. Perceived Training Deficits and Support Needs of the Teaching Staff

- Insufficiency of Initial and In-Service Training: Initial training of teachers within the university environment was not in most cases sufficient to deal with individual students with SEN. Low levels of awareness of some didactic pedagogical methods to students with such needs as ASD were shown by all teachers. There was a broad appeal for ongoing and specialist training that would marry theoretical expertise and practical, contemporary methods for diversity management. Most common issue was probably the fact that there isn't autism training for the entire teaching staff but only for specialists. In-service teacher training, in this case conducted by Teacher Training Centers (CEPs), was severely limited and focused only on already specialized profiles of the area, even though SEN students who are integrated into ordinary classes are increasing. That leaves us with independent study, which is not undertaken by everyone;
- Lack of Access to Material Resources and Specialist Staff Unavailability: Spain was also beset by the pervasive unavailability of specialist staff (i.e., speech therapists, pedagogues, psychologists, PTIS). UDAs and Ecuadorian DECEs were not necessarily staffed with complete multidisciplinary teams, e.g., a language therapist and a psychologist, and thus the service quality was consequently undermined. Bureaucratized yearly averages of diagnostic procedures negatively impacted intervention quality and promptness. Materially, the general lack of flexible and up-to-date material suitable for ASD students with comorbid ADHD was mentioned. Older technologies, i.e., projectors or TVs, existed but the Ecuadorian Ministry of Education's tight budget plan did not allow them to be adequately stocked. This would thus mean that teachers or "shadow mothers" (home relatives without training) would have to prepare materials, their workload thus also increased;
- Coordination problems: calls notwithstanding, intra-institutional coordination with professionals from the same institution was fairly optimal, while there were significant coordination gaps both with extraintitutional professionals, i.e., psychologists or speech therapists outside the school, or between school grades. In Ecuadorian contexts, coordination with professionals not employed at the school was hindered by impossibility to organize an appointment time or not attending. Ecuador's "shadow mother," though providing one-on-one care, was unpedagogically skilled, and the intervention was discontinuous in quality. Lack of standard operating procedures and supervision schedules also affected continuity of learning.

3. Specific Learning Difficulties in ASD and ADHD Comorbidity

- **Diagnosis and Comorbidity:** Despite DSM-V-TR availability for ASD/ADHD co-occurrence probabilities, the context in Ecuador falls behind in research for the clear description of its comorbid presentation. It therefore has record-breaking implications in the educational and health intervention on one condition without taking into consideration dyadic complex interference interaction. Additionally, the efficacy of diagnostic measures and expert training for application to proper diagnosis is not available;
- **Executive Function Influence:** The most impacted executive functions in co-occurrence of ASD and ADHD include working memory, planning, reasoning, and organization. They are manifested as time control, planning of activity on the long-term level, punctuality, and homework completion.
 - **Attentional and Behavioral Difficulties:** Over-distractibility and inattention are long-standing attentional and behavioral difficulties. In *CasoEcu1*, inattention directly impacted executive functions by suppressing instructional quality. Stereotypies and repetitive hyperactivity are typical behavior;
 - **Language, Literacy, and Communication Delays:** Severe delay in language impacts communicative and socialisation ability with the resultant consequence being socially withdrawn by the subject. Echolalia and babbling are present. Use of language, compliance with verbal command, and gaze direction are areas in which most difficulty is reported. Literacy too is an area where a transition to the use of global rather than syllabic or synthetic approaches to reading is evident. Writing production difficulty and fine motor difficulty are also reported; writing in *CasoEcu1* was at a very early stage of development.
 - **Socioeconomic Factors:** Under-diagnosis delayed and lower quality provision by virtue of lower socioeconomic status and Ecuadorian cultural belief, further complicating learning difficulties.

4. Family Role and Support

Parents of SEN students have longstanding issues, and these are the ones which need to be sorted out systemically which isn't always necessarily coordinated by UDAI or other similar-type schools.

- **Predisposition and involvement:** Involvement and predisposition by the family are always going to be of most value to education's quality and influence of interventions.
- **Communication:** Regular and persistent interaction between the schools and the families is greatly essential in attempting to maintain educational continuity alongside sharing and obtaining information that is of utmost relevance in terms of the clinical profile as well as student progress. This vision is so frequently obscured by misperception, seen insensitivity, or time deficit to render family involvement diminished.
- **Systemic Deficit Intervention:** The families will be forced en masse to become active and protective agents (e.g., "shadow mothers") and turn themselves into "doctors" of drug delivery, due to systemic failures of the takeover by public authorities of access to enough human and material resources. i.e., privatizing public experts at a cost.
- **Training and Awareness:** Evidently, parents should be made aware and trained so they possess information to deal with the disorder better and realize their status within the family, removing illusions and myths.
- **Role of Associations:** Private associations and organizations have a powerful compensatory function in the two nations, supplementing public school and health care and supporting families, particularly where public services are substandard.

They describe a multifaceted mix of system, resource, and attitudinal barriers undermining the desired role and contribution of UDAI to its objective of enhancing genuinely inclusive schooling in Ecuador.

Discussion

The findings of the study agree with the widespread and ingrained incongruence between Ecuador's legislative intent to foster inclusive education and practice of the UDAI, teachers, and families. While the UDAI exists and there is robust normative architecture detailing the espoused value to inclusion, pressures from the daily business of schooldom significantly limit the provision of quality, fair education for SEN pupils.

UDAIs operation, so advanced as it is—from initial discovery and long-term psychopedagogical evaluation to the delivery of continuing advice and counsel—plainly is of preeminent importance. Such provisions are needed for the development of individualized education plans from general legislative goals and for the facilitation of curricular accommodations that are specifically tailored to meet the specifications of specific students. But these are formally overridden by a severe lack of trained personnel and equipment. This endemic undermanning is worst criminally responsible for the excessively high diagnostic delay (mean 12 months), which in specialist opinion in large measure deprives of early treatment and education. This is worst in children with complex presentation such as ASD with ADHD, where early and specific intervention is worth its weight in gold in the avertibility of the exacerbated symptomatology and executive dysfunction. Lack of specialist equipment and multi-modal treatment makes the case worse with generic treatment not being in a position to curb the combined interaction of the comorbid conditions (Bartolomé et al., 2021; Marcilla et al., 2025).

The lack of specialist training and sensitization of general teachers in light of increasingly more students with SEN coming into normal schools becomes a primary hindrance. They are most likely to suggest that they do not have proper training and unsure, and this results in negative attitudes or referral to specialists (Castillo et al., 2023). This is complemented by relative unavailability and availability of in-service professional training, primarily for state school teachers where the in-service professional training will more likely be off-duty and unpaid. It's a vicious circle: without the training, the teachers are unsure; unsure, teachers will resist inclusive methods; and without good sound, inclusive methods, UDAI assistance is wasted. This mentality among instructors of SEN students as “[...] slowing down the pace of learning of the entire class”, is the natural result of such a deficit in training and support (Caraballo et al., 2023).

The incidence of “monopolistic contributions” to the class conversation or practice teaching tilted in the direction of direct instruction over dialogicity, may be induced or amplified by teacher vagueness in bringing different needs for learning into concord. An inclusive classroom as a thought leader through research on teaching discursive moves (TDM) means teachers participate in the construction of a “work climate” toward dialogicity, respect, and social construction of knowledge. Lara Orozco et al. (2021) operate outside the IRE sequence and trigger the students to answer conceptual questions (TDM 08), predict (TDM 17), or explain (TDM 18). These have been described as having been observed in their ability to realize criticality and intersubjectivity. The ability of the teachers to publicly commend the students for their input (TDM 02, type 2) and allow for the collaboration is where respectfulness and trustfulness culture emanates from, needed to lead toward dialogicity and constructive learning.

The regulation of the teacher as such a fine instrument of guided participation and intersubjective construction of the very same worldview is the second feature. The overall absence of such training in how to deal with these TDMs, combined with over-capacity class, makes way for the self-reinforcing device of judgmental and monologic speech shutting down SEN students' learning process. Dominant discursive practice (TDM 04) is hard to challenge because content is imposed, not co-constructed (Pérez et al., 2023).

Also, the disabling model of disability in Ecuador, which is one where it is seen as a contained limitation on the student, not as one which must be changed structurally and funded, is one of the drivers for "integration" instead of real "inclusion.". This is motivated by socioeconomic disadvantage and social stigma, and this is at the expense of the SEN students, primarily in the public and marginal schools where cultural belief may pre-empt diagnosis or treatment and where the resources are very poor. Successful such access to expert provision adds up to private provision, inaccessible to most on economic grounds, is clear on the absence of equity in the system at present and builds a "filter" at a social class level because of the ability of more provided-for private schools to cater more precisely to diversity.

Poor interinstitutional coordination is also an important barrier. While UDAIs are designed to operate in cooperation with DECE and schools, the lack of incentivized follow-through and communication among these stakeholders creates abandonment sentiments among most families and teachers. Over-reliance on "shadow mothers" (untrained relatives), say, to provide one-to-one care is no more than continuing system failure in provision of supportive trained staff and not planning for an actual multidisciplinary intervention. Both the "Plan del Buen Vivir" and the "Agenda Nacional para la Igualdad de Discapacidades" both theoretically have promise to effectuate rights and inclusion but whose application as universal, adequately funded interventions is a welcome challenge (Quijije et al., 2021; Veloso et al., 2020). The appeal to a process of audit to UDAI and DECE so that their effectiveness might be made evident and refinement therefrom in fact indirectly concedes such institutional inadequacies.

The ASD comorbid student has instructional profile – i.e., greatest extent of executive function deficit, greatest extent of behavior and attention difficulties, delay in language and literacy – that necessitates greatest individualized and specially designed instruction (Ramírez et al., 2023; Verdugo & Palacios, 2024). Training and support of teachers needed to implement in providing in applying those instruction strategies are not offered by the system. Written production and fine motor use, for example, have only their fundamental forms in the pedagogic support and specially designed materials area as required. Even AAC system use, albeit with as much consideration as is reasonably possible, depends on systematic and knowledgeable use, which is far too frequently not made available at systems levels through professional or family background instruction.

In practice, albeit legally created by law as an expression of the policy of inclusion in Ecuador, the UDAIs are not succeeding in their promise through the combined effect of under-funding, professional incompetence, bureaucratic inefficiency, and deeply rooted social perceptions of disability (Roselló et al., 2021). All these taken together pose a very real challenge to the delivery of effectively inclusive and equitable education to SEN children and particularly more severe comorbidities. This difference between policy and practice not only affects the students' success but also bothered teachers and families and is shameful to the whole inclusive education setting.

Conclusions

According to the aims and definition of data gathered, the following are the results:

1. Contribution of UDAI to Detection, Assessment, and Psychopedagogical Orientation: UDAI are officially assigned a fundamental function in the Ecuadorian education system, i.e., early detection, psychopedagogical evaluation, and permanent orientation of students with Special Educational Needs. They prepare psychopedagogical reports guiding teaching intervention, suggesting curricular modification, and suggesting inclusive action to the school system and professionals. The mandate role positions UDAI in a front-line position in implementing Ecuador's law of inclusive education with the vision to make use of articles within the law and interpret them as relevant aid to student diversity and serve as a helpful go-between between legislative abstractions and practice;
2. Most Serious Problems and Challenges Faced by the UDAI Experts: Most serious working challenges have faced the UDAI experts being employed by them while performing their work:
 - People and Equipment: UDAI is plagued with habitual lack of quality people (i.e., occupational therapists, social workers) and hence efficient multidisciplinary intervention into schools. This is followed by the general lack of good material and technical equipment made available at government schools, with parents and teachers hence always going without themselves or paying out for costly, private options;
 - Bureaucracy and Delay: Diagnostic and assessment procedures are bureaucratic and lengthy, causing delay of up to 12 months, far too discouraging to responsive provision and early intervention of immediate educational adjustment. Years of operation lost are for the purpose of abandonment feelings by teachers consulted prematurely but without follow-through advisory consistency to implementation;
 - Sensitization and Training: Virtual lack of specialized, periodic, and mandatory training on SEN topic areas regarding such multisystem complex comorbid conditions as ASD and ADHD for regular teachers is one of the causative factors in deficiency and resistance toward inclusion by their own selves. More sensitization and inclusion among regular school populations are needed in embracing diversity with open heartfulness as strength;
 - Stigma and Conceptualization: Identification of education system with SEN and disability stigma as inherent deficit rather than systems adaptation need deepens education trajectory and integration of students. Apart from economic disparities offers differential opportunity for access to high-quality inclusive education, provided more generously through private centers in terms of resource supplementation;
 - Breakdown of coordination: Although coordination is unavoidable, coordination among UDAI, DECE, school, and family remains an issue owing to procedure designing time gaps, insufficient time, and virtual lack of participation of all concerned. The support system is decentralized and thus further burdening the family which might have limited resources and knowledge for supporting home learning continuation.
3. Comorbid ASD and Learning Disabilities: Individuals comorbid for ASD and ADHD have characteristic phenotypic variability with marked impairment of executive function (planning, organization, memory, reasoning). Individuals comorbid for ASD and ADHD also have marked attentional and behavioral impairment (distractibility, stereotypy, hyperactivity) that markedly disrupt the capacity to

engage in academically productive activity. They also exhibit apparent language delay, reading, and global communicative capacity, i.e., comprehension deficit, non-verbal, and global reading strategy bias. Fine motor deficit with planning and resistance to written productions are also typical. These deficits are modulated by socioeconomic status and lack of adequate access to special, targeted intervention as well.

Last but not least, while UDAI is the basis of Ecuador's inclusive education policy, they are suicidally compromised by chronic human and material resource deficits, training deficits, bureaucratic incompetence, and more broadly, utopian code-pragmatic practice disconnect. Inclusive education vision will need to be empirically evidenced fact for all SEN pupils in Ecuador if it is to succeed.

Limitations and future research

This qualitative, descriptive, and interpretive case study, by its very nature, is focalized on a couple of cases and sites. Therefore, even though its findings, to the extent that they are descriptive in terms of quantity, are not necessarily so generalizable or, projectively, so applicable to all of these kinds of places. Despite utmost triangulation of participant and method types (questionnaires, interviews, observation, discussion groups, document analysis) to the extreme to allow for credibility and trustworthiness, opinions and facts accrued are limited by the specific realities under study. Since reports based, as much as the information contained, on what data collection was at the time of their respective publication dates.

Based on these recorded limitations and based on the wealth of information that has been obtained, the following possible future researches are suggested:

- Investigate specifically the phenomena that actually limit inclusive education policy transfer in actual practice from the practitioners' perspective in UDAI, i.e., for children who are afflicted by severe comorbidities such as ASD and ADHD. This would entail critical examination of the existing UDAI protocols and their implementation into practice, and where policy-practice dissonance can be determined;
- Conduct detailed quantitative analysis of staffing, resource utilization, and caseloads of teachers for UDAI by different regions of Ecuador to determine empirical evidence of the magnitude of shortage of resources and association with educational attainment for SEN students. It could provide guidance to point to priority policy and investment interventions;
- Evaluate the efficacy and reach of current and future teacher training on inclusive education and SEN, for example, their usability, accessibility, and perceived usefulness to teachers. It must contain longitudinal questionnaires for tracking teachers' attitudes, pedagogy (e.g., usage of TDMs), and students' performance after training;
- Create and apply new models of interinstitutional coordination that promote constructive collaboration between UDAI, DECE, ordinary schools, and healthcare professionals. Pilot schemes to strengthen communication networks, define lines of responsibility, and organize more coordinated multidisciplinary assessment, even to the point of severing diagnostic delay, could be encompassed;
- Examine the intent and impact of specially designed training and awareness programs among SEN pupil family groups, but particularly among lower socio-economic groups. Research must consider how increased family awareness and support can enhance pupil development, attempt to eliminate misinformation and stigmatization, and reduce system stress;

- Compare the long-term academic and social trajectories of SEN pupils to whom UDAI intervention was presented and SEN pupils to whom no intervention was presented, where appropriate longitudinal data are available. This would evaluate the quantifiable outcomes and applicability for improvement of the UDAI intervention effect;
- Continue to investigate the socioeconomic and cultural determinants of detection, diagnosis, and SEN response through education in Ecuador and how they result in non-equitable access to UDAI services and quality inclusive education;
- Examine more closely students' discursive moves (SDM) and how they are constructed by and construct TDMs, and how epistemic authority asymmetry occurs in the classroom between teacher and students. This could give more nuanced understanding of micro-interactions impeding or promoting inclusion, and offer teachers an idea of how to provide more space for conversation even in challenging situations;
- Utilize mixed-methods research designs (quantitative and qualitative) to find even greater insight into things and to be able to generalize to wider, more diverse populations.

Through investigating such research lines, research will be well placed in the future to contribute meaningfully to the construction of scientific knowledge, to knowledge in support of policy reform, and to the construction of a more effective pedagogic methodology for special educational needs students and finally to the construction of a radically more democratic, more humane, and more equitable system of education for Ecuador.

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Data Availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, upon reasonable request.

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