

Article

## Higher education as a scenario for the inclusion of sexual diversity in the classroom.

### La educación superior como escenario para la inclusión de la diversidad sexual en el aula de clases

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### Abstract

In the current society, there are rapid and constant dynamics around the diversity of gender, race, religion, and culture. Although speech is about inclusive education, significant inclusive progress has been made concerning some minority groups around the world; in some countries such as Colombia, the perspective is not the same. This study was carried out in a private higher education institution located in Cundinamarca, Colombia, to learn about the student's and teacher perceptions regarding sexual diversity inclusion inside the classroom. The population of interest is the LGTBIQ community (Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, Transsexuals, Intersexes, and Queer). The research responds to a descriptive qualitative study based on semi-structured interview applied to two students and two

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professors (with informed consent). For the descriptive analysis was used the software Atlas Ti V. 8.0, from which the following deductive categories were obtained: discrimination, diversity, invisibility, and finally a result, an inductive category: institutionality. The interviewee's perception is that Colombian society is based on institutional paradigms, religious doctrine, and a heterosexual approach. Finally, while the teachers feel that they are addressing the issue and there is not rejection towards the LGBTIQ community, the students express that they feel discriminated against, that they are seen as "weirdo" and that it takes time to fit into the classroom.

**Key words:** Gender equality; Institutionality; LGBTIQ community; Perception.

## **Resumen**

En la sociedad actual se presentan dinámicas de cambio rápidas y constantes alrededor de la diversidad de género, raza, religión y cultura. Aunque actualmente se habla de educación inclusiva y se han logrado avances significativos respecto a algunos grupos minoritarios, en algunos países como Colombia el panorama no es el mismo. Este estudio se realizó en una institución de educación superior privada ubicada en Cundinamarca, Colombia, con el objetivo de conocer la percepción de estudiantes y profesores de un pregrado frente a la inclusión de la diversidad sexual en el escenario de aprendizaje. La población de interés es la comunidad LGTBIQ (Lesbianas, Gays, Bisexuales, Transexuales, Intersexuales y Queer). La investigación responde a un estudio cualitativo descriptivo basado en una entrevista semiestructurada realizada a dos estudiantes y dos profesores (con consentimiento informado), para su análisis descriptivo se utilizó el software Atlas Ti, versión 8.0, del cual se obtuvieron las siguientes categorías deductivas: discriminación, diversidad, invisibilidad y finalmente como resultado una categoría inductiva: institucionalidad. La percepción de los entrevistados es que la sociedad colombiana está basada en paradigmas de institucionalidad, doctrina religiosa y enfoque heterosexual. Finalmente mientras los profesores sienten que abordan el tema y no existe rechazo hacia la comunidad LGBTIQ, los estudiantes expresan que se sienten discriminados, que los miran como "bichos raros" y que lleva tiempo encajar en el aula de clase.

**Palabras clave:** Comunidad LGBTIQ; Igualdad de género; Institucionalidad; Percepción.

## **Introduction**

Contemporary society is characterized by dynamics of rapid and constant change around diversity of gender, race, religion and culture. Frequently in the media we observe facts related to any type of discrimination that are socially repudiated through social networks or synchronized citizen demonstrations in various parts of the world; and it is this scenario, which highlights an urgent call to education to review its training role based on respect and tolerance towards differences.

Since the end of the previous century, there has been talk of inclusive education as a model that avoids educational disparity and it has been achieved, significant progress has been made for some minority groups; however, this panorama is not the same in all countries. In the case of Colombia, research conducted (Brigeiro, Castillo and Murad as cited in Franco, Correa, Venet and Pérez, 2016) on problems related to negative attitudes towards minority populations make an urgent call to be addressed, and not only from young people but also from teachers, confirming what another study reveals (Franco, Correa, Venet and Pérez, 2016) in which the perception of students is that some teachers do not know about sexual diversity; and at the same time, they state negative attitudes towards the lesbian, gay and bisexual population. Similarly, news related to discrimination are continuously part of the news agenda of some media in Colombia and cases of bullying in schools for being homosexual are the most frequent and in many spaces the phenomenon has become naturalized.

For the purposes of this document, which seeks to propose a training plan to include diversity in the classroom in a higher education institution, the SWOT matrix was developed based on qualitative research. In this sense, the elements that were taken into account in the training plan are the result of semi-structured interviews and literature review in databases.

Higher education as a scenario for the inclusion of sexual diversity in the classroom.

The university as an educational system and the classroom as a social system are an active part of society, dependent on it for support. Likewise, to the extent that the academic system is a distinct subsystem of society, complex interdependent forms are interwoven between the two, and thus the university depends on external sources for its political and economic support, even when its efforts are not of an immediate pragmatic nature. (Parsons, 1968). Under this principle this study will be developed, which seeks to make an approximation of how what happens in the classroom is a reflection of society, and in this particular case, focused on the inclusion of sexual diversity in the classroom.

The educational scenario object of this research is a higher education institution with more than 25 years offering academic programs in Colombia. It began its work in 1992 with 240 students in Bogota and by 2018 it had approximately 130 thousand students and 4,800 collaborators, including professors and administrative staff. It currently offers professional technical, labor technical, technology, university, specializations and master's degrees in more than seventy municipalities in the country. Thus, the geographical dispersion and the number of students and collaborators frame this institution, in a space full of multiple cultures, ethnicities, beliefs and sexual identities.

In this order of ideas, it can be stated that an educational institution has similar characteristics to an organization. For Chiavenato (2017), "an organization is a set of people who act together and divide activities in an appropriate way to achieve a common purpose" (p.19); in the same sense, he explains that they are social instruments that allow achieving objectives in a group way that would be unattainable individually. And the university, as a subsystem of society, is an organization whose core is to provide educational services to a given population.

Under the above dynamics, for more than a decade there has been talk of the need to have a diverse organizational composition,

relating it to the assertion that the success of teamwork depends largely on the individual attributes of each of the members. (Horwitz, 2005). For this same author, the core of the organization must be diverse because he affirms that, if diversity is integrated, it will be possible to work as a single cohesive and coordinated entity that achieves common goals.

Now, when we talk about sexual diversity education, we are talking about:

To teach students that there are people who have an erotic and affective attraction to people of the same sex, that these people deserve respect and that their families are as normal as families formed by heterosexuals. In addition, it is explained that there are people who have a gender that does not correspond to their birth sex and that they deserve total respect as any other person. No more and no less. (p.426).

As mentioned above, we seek to include sexual diversity in the classroom and therefore it is key to indicate that for the purposes of this document the term LGTIBQ will be used. In this regard, the United Nations (UN) refugee agency UNHCR (2014), in order to protect members of this community, issued guidelines on their international protection. In this guideline, it gives scope to the terminology for its proper use:

**Lesbian:** A woman who is enduringly physically, romantically and/or emotionally attracted to other women.

**Gay men:** The term gay can be used for both men and women; however, it is most often used to describe a man who is enduringly physically, romantically and/or emotionally attracted to other men.

**Bisexual:** Used to describe a person who is physically, romantically and/or emotionally attracted to either men or women.

**Transgender:** Refers to a gender identity and not a sexual orientation. A transgender person may be straight, gay, lesbian or bisexual.

**Intersex:** Explains a condition in which an individual is born with reproductive or sexual anatomy and/or chromosome patterns that do not appear to conform to typical biological notions of male or

female. These conditions may be evident at birth; they may also appear at puberty, or they may only be discovered during routine medical care.

**Queer:** Although not defined by UNHCR (2014), it is a transitive verb that "expresses the concept of "destabilizing," "disturbing," "humping"; therefore, queer practices rely on the notion of destabilizing norms that are seemingly fixed. The adjective queer means "weird," "twisted," "strange." (Fonseca, C., and Quintero, M., 2009).

Chin & Trimble (2015) assert that leaders of the 21st century will find themselves increasingly involved in heterogeneous contexts within organizations and communities; likewise, they assert that these leaders need to be prepared to lead diverse workforces, deal with rapid change and be more inclusive to respond to the concerns of contemporary society, which are marked by change, innovation and diversity. When talking about leadership for diversity, it is about how differences and inclusion are reflected in the paradigms that define leadership and how its effectiveness is evaluated. In this same sense, Arredondo et al. (1996) affirm that teachers must have multicultural competencies that go hand in hand with the diversity of young people.

In the scenario that concerns this research, diversity is part of the cultural richness of the classroom, all students are important no matter who they are, where they come from or how they self-identify. In the same way, teachers need to be aware that their LGTBIQ students may experience some type of stress in the classroom and that may affect their learning. (Lilienthal, Matyo, Messinger, & Mims, 2018). So, when talking about diversity in the classroom it includes sexual orientation, gender, and gender identity/expression, (Barros Bastidas, C., & Turpo Gebera, O. 2018). (Adams & Persinger, 2013). Within the perception of sexual diversity in the classroom by students and teachers, the four interviewees of this research gave their concept:

Interviewee 1. "Sexual diversity is free thought, free development of personality. Where you are the owner of your body. You own your standards within established limits."

Interviewee 2. "The capacity that we all human beings have and want to have to get out of these hegemonies and this, like, heteronormative structure in which we all have to want something specific, so, diversity is like this capacity to be able to develop ourselves sexually as we want and in many ways."

Interviewee 3. "Free speech".

Interviewee 4. "The capacity we have as human beings to choose freely. Whatever we want for our company, it can be permanent company, or partial company".

Russell, Kosciw, Horn, and Saewyc (2010) developed a strategy that suggests the school have resources and support available related to LGBTIQ issues. One example noted in their study is the immersion of the topic in the curricula; as well as including a course that serves to promote a school climate of student well-being. In this same analysis, they found that these strategies invite students to distinguish between their personal values and an ethic based on tolerance and inclusion. Likewise, Leonardi and Staley (2015) confirm this strategy after recognizing the changes that have occurred in global education systems.

In the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the United Nations (2015) stipulated in Article 1 that: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights and, endowed as they are with reason and conscience, should behave towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood" (p. 2); and in Article 2 it stated that: "Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political opinion or any other opinion.); and in its article 2 it declared that: "Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status" (p.3). Under this universal normative framework of the mid-twentieth century, many countries legislated to give scope to the fulfillment of human rights and to ensure that they are available to all their citizens.

In Colombia there is Law 1482 of 2011, also known as the Anti-discrimination Law. It stipulates several aspects that seek to legislate

and combat discrimination against the LGTBIQ community in various contexts. Among its guidelines, the Law expresses clarity regarding:

1. Prisons must respect inmates belonging to the LGBTI community.
2. Homosexual communities have the right to hold parades.
3. Lack of information about an adoptive parent's sexual orientation cannot be a criterion for revocation of adoption
4. A person may not be prevented from being in a particular sector or being detained because of his or her sexual orientation.
5. Kissing with your partner is part of your personal freedom, regardless of your sexual condition.
6. Obligation of health insurance companies to perform sex reassignment surgery.
7. Public schools may not deny student space to homosexuals.
8. Homosexual persons can donate blood without any discrimination based on their sexual orientation.
9. Change of name for the second time on the basis of gender identity.
10. Right to pension and patrimonial substitution in same-sex couples.
11. Equal adoption is one of the rights recognized by the Constitutional Court.

Likewise, in Colombia the political regulation for the LGTBIQ community is very weak, as stated by Cornejo, Martínez and Vidal-Ortiz (2018) when they state that in Latin America the protection of these communities is centered in countries such as Brazil, Argentina and Chile. This effect is largely due to a backwardness generated by the armed conflict that the country has had to live through and by the strong influence of the Catholic Church.

As far as the classroom is concerned, it is necessary to take into account the local legislation that regulates the rights and duties of each actor in this academic space. The 1991 Political Constitution of

Colombia is one of the most liberal in Latin America, which facilitated promoting the sexual and reproductive rights of Colombians; however, the existence of a particular law, still nonexistent, that protects the rights of LGBTIQ people is required (Cornejo et al., 2018).

## **Materials and methods**

The research was conducted in a private higher education institution, located in Cundinamarca, Colombia, whose general objective was to know the perception of the inclusion of sexual diversity (LGBTIQ community) in the classroom, which students and professors of an undergraduate program have. The results analyzed correspond to four semi-structured interviews, developed according to Hernández-Sampieri, Fernández, and Baptista (2014) "for a qualitative research of phenomenological character due to the fact that questions were asked about the essence of experiences: what several people experience in common regarding a phenomenon or process" (p.471).

The instruments were applied to two students and an undergraduate professor who are members of the LGTBIQ community and to another professor from the same program who does not belong to this population. (See annexes 1, 2 and 3). The interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed and for the organization, categorization and analysis of the information the Atlas Ti software, version 8.0, was used. The information was then coded and the categorical map of the hermeneutic unit was developed. For the segmentation, an alphanumeric code was developed for the primary sources, the codes and the respective segments, three deductive categories were considered: visibility, inclusion and learning-teaching sexual diversity (see Table 1). The selected categories obey what is described by Lee and Carpenter (2015) as the main factors that generate criticism in the classroom.

Table 1.

*Alphanumeric segmentation codes for primary sources*

Primary sources	Alphanumeric code
Semi-structured interview LGBTI 1	A
Semi-structured interview LGBTI 2	B
Semi-structured interview Non-LGBTI teacher	C
Semi-structured interview LGBTI teacher	D
Deductive Categories	Alphanumeric code
Visibility	01
Inclusivity	
Learning-teaching sexual diversity	

The triangulation of the information was developed with secondary information, indexed scientific articles, corresponding to qualitative and quantitative research results that allowed the discussion of the results. In the same way, the research responds to Resolution 8430 of 1993, Article 11, as a research without risk; nevertheless, the interviews were carried out with prior informed consent, following the ethical principles and the rigor of the regulations for research with humans.

## Results

Once the interviews were analyzed using Atlas Ti version 8.0 software, a categorical map was generated with the following deductive categories: Inclusivity, visibility and learning - teaching with a sexual diversity approach, see Figure 1; after the analysis, the

following deductive categories were obtained: discrimination, diversity and invisibility and an inductive category: institutionalism, which are the basis for analyzing the perception of the interviewees.

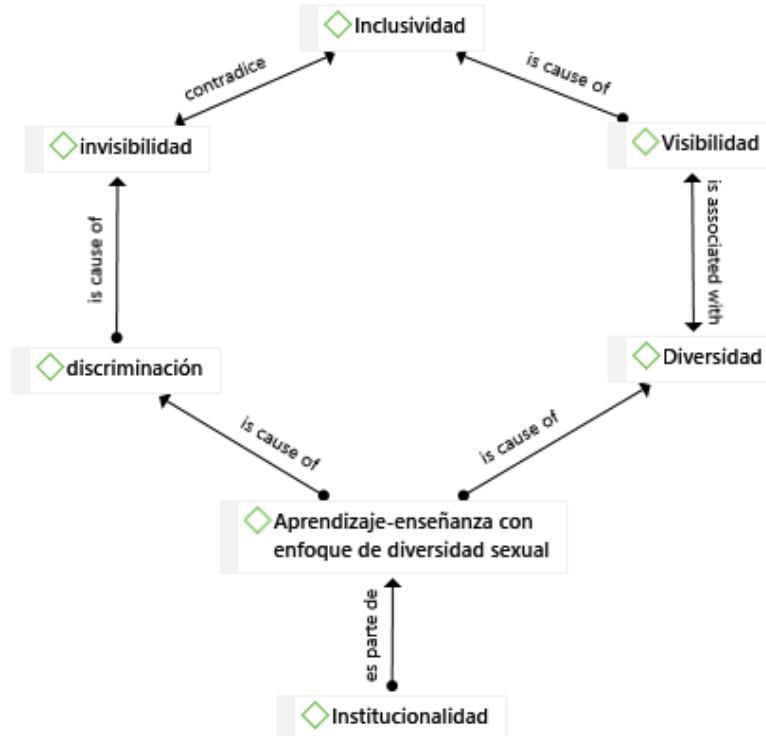


Figure 1. Categorical map: deductive categories. Atlas TI version 8.0. Authors

In addition, a word cloud was generated in order to identify the terms most frequently used by the interviewees, see Figure 2; for example, the use of connectors or crutches is frequent, as well as the repetition of the following words: community, sexuality, people, freedom and knowledge.

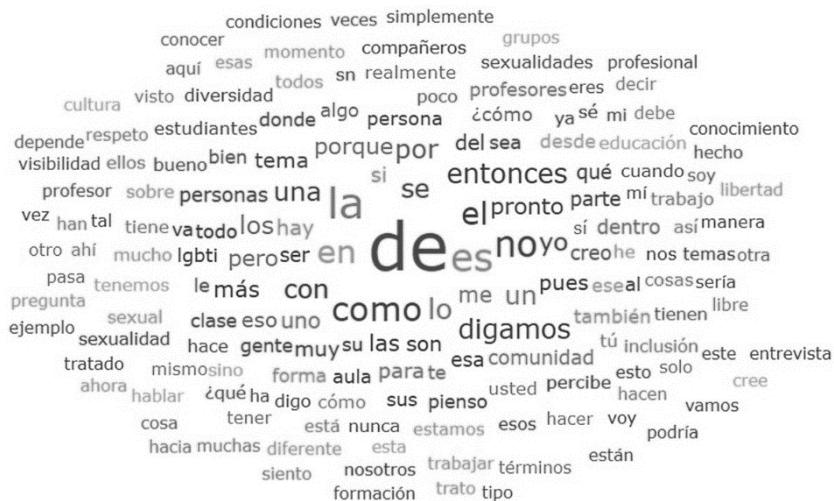


Figure 2. Word cloud. Atlas TI version 8.0. Authors

## Discussion

In order to identify the perception of sexual diversity of the group of interviewees, a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) matrix was developed (see Table 2). The categorization performed was guided by the paradigms associated with the composition, core and environment, known as the three Cs by their initials in English. (Chin & Trimble, 2015).

Based on this analysis, an improvement plan was projected to include sexual diversity in the classroom in order to understand the challenges of education in terms of gender and sexuality and reduce the invisibility of the LGBTIQ community in this scenario; pursuing as a sole purpose, the promotion of inclusion, respect and permanence of students and teachers. (Vigano and Laffin, 2017). Thus, when we talk about inclusion in the classroom, we refer to the need to include all the individuals that compose it, both the teacher and his students regardless of the particularities.

Table 2.

*SWOT Matrix*

Fortress	Weaknesses
Corporate Principles: #2 Ethical Attitude #5 Inclusion and educational equity, #10 cultural identity	Culture shock refers to tensions and feelings of discomfort and rejection. Poor communication on the subject.
Active students belonging to the LGBTIQ community	Lack of teacher training. Fear to address the subject on the part of teachers.
Teachers belonging to the LGBTIQ community	Didactic tools related to sexual diversity
Intervention project: "The future of LGBTIQ victims: an action to assert themselves in society".	exist but are not implemented in the classroom.
Opportunities	Threats
Visibility of members of the LGBTIQ community.	Rejection by groups against the LGBTIQ population.
Integration of members of the LGBTIQ community.	Competitor's offer with greater freedom on this issue.
Training of LGBTIQ professionals convinced of their capabilities.	Rejection by supporters of the traditional church
Strategic location for offering education to the LGBTIQ community	Shortage of personnel willing to address the LGBTIQ community.

Based on the findings identified in the SWOT matrix, a diversity training plan has been proposed. This plan is designed on the basis of systematic activities planned for the achievement of objectives related to the inclusion of diversity in the classroom.

According to the results obtained in the inductive category called institutionalism, it refers to the principles imparted by the church, the family, schools and other institutions that make heterosexuality be seen as a matter of normality, and everything that disagrees with this context is considered "abnormal". This is consistent with studies such as that of Cornejo et al. (2018), in which they report that Colombia and Peru are countries where true inclusion has not

occurred due to war, internal conflicts and the strong influence of religious doctrine.

This last aspect means that teaching and learning about sexual diversity is conditioned by the institutional framework and then bifurcates between those who admit diversity in society and those who discriminate against it. Those who include diversity make it visible and this results in the inclusiveness of the LGBTIQ population in the general community; and on the other hand, there are those who discriminate against it, make it invisible and this contradicts the possibility of including them as part of a community and seeing them as individuals with equal treatment and rights.

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