

Article

Inclusive Higher Education and Disability: Policy–Implementation Gaps Across Universities in Mexico and Colombia

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Abstract

Objective: To compare disability-inclusion strategies and programmes in higher education institutions in Mexico and Colombia and identify organisational conditions associated with gaps between policy intentions and implementation. **Methods:** A qualitative comparative multi-case design used a documentary corpus of 15 materials and eight semi-structured interviews with adult professional key informants, one per case university. A criterion-based purposive sample of eight universities (four per country) balanced public and private institutions and prioritised cases with disability-support units or inclusive education programmes. Data were analysed through grounded theory-informed axial and selective coding, with triangulation across documents and interviews; informed consent was obtained. **Results:** Five categories structured the findings: inclusive cultures, inclusive policies, inclusive practices, educational trajectories and progress/challenges. Within this case set, Mexican universities showed stronger institutionalisation through protocols, structured support routes and more visible technological accessibility. Colombian universities showed more fragmented implementation, often dependent on local initiatives, with persistent attitudinal barriers and weaker systematisation. In both contexts, misalignment between normative discourse and implementation capacity constrained staff training and impact evaluation. **Conclusions:** Sustainable inclusion was most evident where institutional culture, policy and practice were aligned. Monitoring mechanisms, stable resourcing and longitudinal support pathways are needed to secure equitable student trajectories from admission to graduation.



Keywords: disability; educational policy; educational trajectories; inclusive higher education

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1. Introduction

Formal disability-inclusion commitments in higher education often fail when students require accessible teaching, assessment, campus participation and progression support [1–5]. Scoping and university equity-diversity-inclusion scholarship similarly show that access becomes meaningful when accommodations, participation and institutional responsibility are treated together [6–8]. The gap reflects how universities assign responsibility for disability: either as individual accommodation or as a design obligation embedded in governance, pedagogy and quality assurance [9]. Inclusion depends on alignment

among institutional culture, policy and routine practice, including how universities define participation, allocate resources and set expectations around disability and learning [10]. Systematic mapping shows that increased presence in higher education has not consistently produced participation, which remains constrained by pedagogical and structural barriers [11]. Leadership, governance and accountability mechanisms shape whether inclusive planning is routinised and evaluated over time [12].

Rights frameworks in Latin America have expanded faster than many university routines that put them into practice. Comparative and regional evidence points to recurring gaps between codified rights and reactive institutional responses, shaped by regulatory clarity, institutional capacity and local resourcing [13–18]. The same tension appears in the balance between standardised governance and personalised support, because students may need individualised adjustments within rules that remain transparent and enforceable [19].

Universities need routines that convert policy into accessible learning environments, trained staff, coordinated services and accountable support routes [9,10,20,21]. Decentralised faculties, heterogeneous curricula and uneven digital accessibility make that conversion fragile when inclusion depends on discretionary goodwill rather than named responsibilities [11,12].

Mexico and Colombia provide a comparative case set because both countries combine rights-based frameworks with documented difficulties in retention, access to academic and technological resources, and inclusive university cultures [22,23]. Mexican equity policies have addressed indigenous, economically disadvantaged and disabled students, whereas Colombian guidelines for inclusive higher education have foregrounded historically excluded populations, including Afro-descendant, rural and disabled groups [24,25]. Regional policy analyses show that rights frameworks require capacity, monitoring and institutional buy-in before they become durable routines [26].

Research with students with visual disability in Mexico describes staff training and accessible technologies, but also reports discontinuity risks [27]. Mexican evidence on teacher self-efficacy and hearing-disability inclusion further ties staff capability, language support and accessibility to higher education inclusion [28,29]. A documentary analysis of Colombia, Mexico and Chile links policy architecture to differences in institutional response [30], while Mexican student accounts specify accessibility and flexibility measures derived from lived conditions [31]. Cross-regional work with disability support leaders distinguishes coherent institutional and cultural models from fragmented assistance-oriented approaches [32] (Table 1).

Table 1. Comparative antecedents on inclusion in higher education in Latin America (selected).

Study	Countries	Design/Data	Participants/Materials	Implementation-Relevant Contribution
[27]	Mexico	Qualitative	10 students; 8 Mexican universities	Describes training and accessible technology efforts; reports limited institutionalisation and discontinuity risks.
[30]	Colombia, Mexico, Chile	Qualitative documentary	22 legislative documents; 28 scientific articles	Compares policy trajectories and regulatory development; links policy architecture to system-level implementation differences.
[31]	Mexico	Qualitative	22 students; federal and state universities	Details lived conditions and proposes accessibility and educational flexibility measures.

Table 1. *Cont.*

Study	Countries	Design/Data	Participants/Materials	Implementation-Relevant Contribution
[32]	Spain, Colombia, France	Qualitative	13 disability support leaders	Contrasts institutional/cultural models with fragmented assistance approaches in disability support services.

The empirical problem is whether disability-inclusion policies remain reliable once universities translate them into support routes, teaching practices and student trajectories. The study compared how universities in Mexico and Colombia organised disability inclusion strategies and programmes, which conditions were associated with stronger implementation, and where discontinuities remained between institutional policy commitments and routine practice. Lessons are framed for Latin American higher education contexts while remaining case-set patterns rather than national rankings.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Study Design and Comparative Logic

Eight university cases in Mexico and Colombia were compared to examine how disability-inclusion commitments were translated into institutional routines. Each university served as the analytic unit, and documentary materials plus key-informant interviews supported comparison of institutional culture, internal policy and enacted practices across public and private cases.

Configurational comparison identified recurring mechanisms, divergences between policy and practice, and conditions associated with stronger or weaker institutionalisation, without estimating national prevalence or causal effects.

2.2. Research Questions

General research question: How are disability inclusion commitments translated into institutional cultures, internal policies and routine practices within universities in Mexico and Colombia, and which organisational conditions explain gaps between policy intent and implementation?

Structured question based on population, exposure or phenomenon, and outcomes:

Population: Public and private universities in Mexico and Colombia with disability support units or inclusive education programmes.

Exposure/phenomenon: Institutional strategies and programmes addressing disability inclusion, including support routes, reasonable adjustments, accessibility and staff training, as enacted through culture–policy–practice alignment [10].

Outcomes:

Primary outcome: Degree of coherence (or misalignment) between normative/institutional commitments and implementation routines across the five analytical categories.

Secondary outcomes: Identified barriers and enabling conditions affecting educational trajectories from admission to graduation, and the patterning of “progress and challenges” across cases.

2.3. Analytical Categories and Working Definitions

The five coding categories followed the framework used here, which treats institutional change as an interaction between culture, policy and practice [10]. The category definitions in Table 2 were applied to documentary and interview material.

Table 2. Analytical categories and working definitions.

Category	Working Definition
Inclusive cultures	Development of a university community grounded in respect, belonging, collaboration, and recognition of all members as valued.
Inclusive policies	Institutional decisions and internal rules intended to secure equity, remove barriers to learning, and ensure access and participation.
Inclusive practices	Pedagogical and organisational strategies that adapt teaching and institutional functioning to student diversity to support learning and participation.
Educational trajectories	Students' pathways through higher education, defined here as admission and graduation.

Note: Category definitions reflect those specified in the study protocol and were applied to both documentary and interview material during coding.

2.4. Case Selection and Setting

Cases entered the sample when they met three criteria: location in Mexico or Colombia, evidence of a disability-support unit or inclusive education programme, and availability of a staff member directly responsible for disability-related support or inclusion strategies. Selection also required institutional records or programme information indicating enrolled students with disabilities. Public and private universities were balanced within and across the two national case sets.

The final set comprised eight anonymised universities, four per country, with public and private sectors represented in each national set; regional descriptors and sectoral classification were used without personal names or case-institution identifiers (Table 3).

Table 3. Case universities (Mexico and Colombia).

Case Label	Country/Sector	Broad Regional Descriptor
MX-1	Mexico/public	Central Mexico
MX-2	Mexico/private	Western Mexico
MX-3	Mexico/private	Central Mexico
MX-4	Mexico/public	Western Mexico
CO-1	Colombia/public	National/central case
CO-2	Colombia/private	Northwestern Colombia
CO-3	Colombia/private	Northeastern/Caribbean Colombia
CO-4	Colombia/public	Northeastern Colombia

Note: Case labels are anonymised; MX denotes Mexico and CO denotes Colombia. Personal names and case-institution identifiers were not reported; regional descriptors retain minimum comparative context.

2.5. Data Sources and Data Collection

The evidence base combined eight semi-structured interviews with 15 documentary materials. One adult professional key informant was interviewed in each case university; four interviews corresponded to Mexico and four to Colombia. The documentary corpus comprised seven national-level instruments and eight institutional documents, including guidelines, internal protocols, regulations, diagnostic materials and programme documents.

Before cross-case comparison, documents identified formal commitments, organisational structures, support routes and accessibility standards; interviews examined how those commitments were interpreted and enacted in each institutional setting. Source-by-category mapping reduced reliance on a single source and distinguished formal policy, reported practice and institutional routines before the cross-country synthesis.

The distribution of key informants across cases is presented in Table 4, the source types and their analytical functions are summarised in Table 5, and the source-to-category mapping used during coding is shown in Table 6.

Table 4. Key informant distribution across anonymised case universities.

Case Label	Country/Sector	No. of Informants	Profile Category
MX-1	Mexico/public	1	Teaching/research
MX-2	Mexico/private	1	Professional/administrative
MX-3	Mexico/private	1	Teaching/administrative
MX-4	Mexico/public	1	Teaching/administrative
CO-1	Colombia/public	1	Administrative/welfare
CO-2	Colombia/private	1	Teaching/research
CO-3	Colombia/private	1	Teaching/research
CO-4	Colombia/public	1	Administrative/inclusion

Note: One adult professional key informant was interviewed per university. Case labels preserve anonymisation and correspond to Table 3; personal and institutional names are not reported in the manuscript.

Table 5. Source types and function in the analysis.

Source Type	Quantity	Origin	Function in the Analysis
Semi-structured interviews	8	One key informant per case university in Mexico and Colombia	To examine reported enactment, implementation frictions, perceived success factors, accompaniment and support practices.
National documents	7	Mexican and Colombian legal/normative frameworks	To characterise regulatory and public-policy frameworks.
Institutional documents	8	Participating universities	To identify protocols, institutional guidelines, diagnostic materials, support routes and accessibility standards.

Note: The documentary corpus comprised national-level and institutional materials; interview material was analysed as case-level key-informant evidence rather than as a frequency base.

Table 6. Source-by-category mapping used during qualitative coding.

Analytical Category	Source Basis	Associated Profile	Use in Analysis
Inclusive cultures	Interviews + institutional documents	Inclusion, welfare and teaching/research profiles	Ownership of inclusion, institutional values and community engagement.
Inclusive policies	Institutional and normative documents + interviews	Administrative, directive and inclusion-support profiles	Internal rules, protocols, routes and policy anchors.
Inclusive practices	Interviews + institutional documents	Teaching/research and support profiles	Enacted adjustments, Universal Design for Learning, sign-language provision and technological supports.
Educational trajectories	Interviews + institutional protocols	Officers involved in accompaniment or support routes	Entry, persistence and graduation-related continuity.
Progress and challenges	Triangulated documents and interviews	All institutional profiles	Cross-case convergence, divergence and implementation constraints.

Note: The mapping identifies the primary source basis used during coding; it does not convert qualitative material into within-university frequency counts.

2.6. Trustworthiness and Quality Procedures

Credibility was supported by instrument validation, transcript verification and source triangulation. Three academics with doctoral degrees in Education or Social Sciences—two Colombian and one Venezuelan—reviewed the data-collection instruments; their feedback refined the interview items for use across both national contexts.

2.7. Data Analysis

Coding followed grounded theory-informed procedures [33]. Axial and selective coding, applied after the five sensitising categories in Table 2, identified relationships among institutional cultures, formal policies, enacted practices, educational trajectories and reported advances or challenges.

Within-country and cross-country comparison linked recurring mechanisms to source convergence and case configuration. Because each university contributed one key-informant interview, thematic statements were not treated as within-university frequencies.

2.8. Ethics

Adult professional key informants provided informed consent before interview participation, including consent for recording where applicable. The project “Educación superior inclusiva. Comparación de estrategias y programas en América Latina: caso México-Colombia” was reviewed by the Comité de Ética en Investigación, Universidad Anáhuac México. The committee considered the study to be minimum-risk educational research involving adult informants and to comply with the institution’s basic ethics criteria for educational research with human participants. Case-university names were anonymised through descriptors, and reporting avoided identifiable individual-level information. Further details on the study procedures, informed consent, recording authorisation, data protection and anonymisation are provided in Appendix A.

2.9. Researcher Positionality

The research team included Mexican and Colombian scholars, which supported reflexive checks during analysis. Team discussion tested whether interpretations were grounded in institutional documents and interviews rather than national assumptions.

2.10. Use of Artificial Intelligence-Assisted Tools

ChatGPT (OpenAI, San Francisco, CA, USA; web-based service without a fixed version number; see Reference [34]) was used solely to support the linguistic revision of selected sections of the manuscript. Human authors retained full responsibility for the data, coding, analytical categories, findings, substantive interpretation and integrity of the content.

3. Results

The eight cases differed in how culture, policy and practice were connected. Formal instruments, protocols, support routes and legal or normative commitments were treated as documentary evidence; descriptions of enactment, perceived success factors, implementation frictions and day-to-day delivery were attributed to key-informant interviews unless documents corroborated them, in which case findings were treated as triangulated.

3.1. Inclusive Cultures (Mexico vs. Colombia)

3.1.1. Inclusive Cultures in Mexican Universities

Triangulated Mexican evidence linked explicit inclusion values to specialised units or committees, senior leadership support and community sensitisation. Private cases also reported educational models that incorporated students with disabilities into university

life through personalised accompaniment and, where reported, Universal Design for Learning (Table 7).

Table 7. Inclusive cultures in Mexican universities (cross-case summary).

Case Identifier	Sector/Site	Culture Mechanisms	Success Factors	Improvement Areas	Distinctive Pattern
MX-1	Public/Central Mexico	Specialised disability unit; Washington Group question set for identification; reasonable adjustments; assistive technologies; awareness campaigns	Clear internal framework; institutional support; presence of a dedicated unit	Attitudinal barriers among teaching staff; legacy infrastructure constraints	Strong anchoring in public-policy alignment and a dedicated unit
MX-2	Private/Western Mexico	Personalised accompaniment; sign language provision; workshops/courses; Universal Design for Learning embedded in the model	Values-driven institutional ethos; active participation; inclusion mainstreamed across the institution	Low visibility of the disability collective; need for deeper cross-faculty mainstreaming	Identity-based institutional ethos used to sustain transversal inclusion
MX-3	Private/Central Mexico	Diploma route focused on intellectual disability; reasonable adjustments; accessibility committee; staff training	Inclusion positioned as an institutional value; rectoral leadership; teamwork; continuity of policies	Wider dissemination of the unit's remit; faculty-level sensitisation; bureaucratic friction	Dedicated programme for intellectual disability and strong symbolic leadership
MX-4	Public/Western Mexico	Inclusion programme; individualised adjustments; inter-departmental collaboration; staff training	Institutional commitment; cross-unit collaboration; individual follow-up	Formalisation of processes; more systematic identification of students with disabilities	Flexible model functioning without a clearly established specialised unit

Note: “Reasonable adjustments” refers to context-specific academic or organisational modifications to remove barriers without lowering academic standards. Case labels are anonymised and correspond to the case universities described in the Methods. Source basis: documents for formal structures, protocols and routes; interviews for delivery details and frictions; triangulation where sources converged.

3.1.2. Inclusive Cultures in Colombian Universities

Colombian documentary materials and interviews located inclusive culture mainly in welfare-oriented and interdisciplinary support services. Attitudinal barriers limited collective ownership in some settings, especially where disability inclusion was not embedded across the wider academic community (Table 8).

Table 8. Inclusive cultures in Colombian universities (cross-case summary).

Case Identifier	Sector/Site	Culture Mechanisms	Success Factors	Improvement Areas	Distinctive Pattern
CO-1	Public/national	Institutional policy (since 2012); Inclusion Observatory; structured accompaniment route from admission to graduation; reasonable adjustments; disability validation procedures	Consolidated internal norms; observatory as a governance anchor; inter-institutional support	Stronger articulation with pre-university education; longer-horizon follow-up	Observatory-led model with an explicit longitudinal route

Table 8. *Cont.*

Case Identifier	Sector/Site	Culture Mechanisms	Success Factors	Improvement Areas	Distinctive Pattern
CO-2	Private/ Northwestern Colombia	Psychological services centre; broad student characterisation; integrated culture–policy–practice approach; no-cost sign language interpreters	Interdisciplinary team; family and teaching-staff integration; accessible key services	Harmonisation of language/procedures; systematisation of support data	Psychological-services hub as the entry point for inclusion
CO-3	Private/ Northeastern/ Caribbean Colombia	Inclusive higher education programme; standardised protocols; psychosocial accompaniment; Universal Design for Learning; technological and infrastructure adaptation	Institutional trajectory; internally developed policy; continuous sensitisation; diversified supports	Further staff sensitisation; persistent attitudinal barriers	Protocol system across campuses, including a digital accessibility hub
CO-4	Public/ Northeastern Colombia	Institutional inclusion route; internal agreement (2015); accompaniment via specialised centre; “shadow” supports; adapted technology; awareness campaigns	Interdisciplinary work; centre-level leadership; non-discrimination certification; continuous staff training; continuity from early stages	Greater provision for visual disability; specialised staff training; stronger access to braille and reading technologies	Inclusion model linked to an early-stage support ecosystem plus certification focus

Note: “Shadow supports” refers to designated support assistants accompanying students where barriers persist. Case labels are anonymised and correspond to the case universities described in the Methods. Source basis: documents for formal structures, protocols and routes; interviews for delivery details and frictions; triangulation where sources converged.

3.1.3. Comparative Pattern (Culture Dimension)

Named structures and sensitisation routines made culture-level support more stable. Mexican cases more often connected institutional values to specialised units or committees; Colombian cases more often rooted inclusive culture in welfare and interdisciplinary support services. In both case sets, attitudinal barriers weakened the movement from declared values to shared academic responsibility.

3.2. Inclusive Policies (Mexico vs. Colombia)

3.2.1. Inclusive Policies in Mexican Universities

Mexican documentary evidence linked inclusion policy to formal instruments, decision routes and institutional anchors. Stability varied by case and was stronger where procedures and support pathways were codified (Table 9).

Table 9. Inclusive policies in Mexican universities (cross-case summary).

Case	Policy Anchors (Formal Instruments and Structures)	Indicators of Institutionalisation	Implementation Constraints (Policy-Side)
MX-1 (public)	Dedicated unit; systematic identification approach (Washington Group set); formal reasonable-adjustment provision	“Clear normative framework”; dedicated unit as a stable policy conduit	Legacy infrastructure and staff-level attitudinal barriers as persistent constraints on enforceability.
MX-2 (private)	Inclusion embedded in educational model; sign-language provision; structured workshops and support routes	Inclusion positioned as a transversal institutional commitment	Need for stronger cross-faculty mainstreaming and improved visibility of the disability collective.

Table 9. *Cont.*

Case	Policy Anchors (Formal Instruments and Structures)	Indicators of Institutionalisation	Implementation Constraints (Policy-Side)
MX-3 (private)	Accessibility committee; staff training (academic and administrative); programme route for intellectual disability	“Continuity of policies” and leadership support sustaining policy coherence	Bureaucratic friction and limited dissemination of the unit’s remit across faculties.
MX-4 (public)	Inclusion programme with individualised adjustments; inter-departmental collaboration	Policy presence without a clearly established specialised unit	Need for formalisation of processes and more systematic identification of students with disabilities.

Note: “Institutionalisation” refers here to stable structures, explicit procedures and routinised support pathways that persist beyond individual champions. Case labels are anonymised and correspond to the case descriptions in Methods. Source basis: documents for formal structures, protocols and routes; interviews for delivery details and frictions; triangulation where sources converged.

3.2.2. Inclusive Policies in Colombian Universities

Colombian institutional agreements and formal routes showed strong policy intent, while interview accounts described uneven enactment across units and campuses. Welfare-linked support systems often carried the practical burden of implementation across the policy anchors, institutionalisation indicators and constraints shown in Table 10.

Table 10. Inclusive policies in Colombian universities (cross-case summary).

Case	Policy Anchors (Formal Instruments and Structures)	Indicators of Institutionalisation	Implementation Constraints (Policy-Side)
CO-1 (public)	Institutional policy (since 2012); Inclusion Observatory; structured route from admission to graduation; disability validation procedures	Observatory as a governance anchor and a defined longitudinal route	Need for stronger articulation with earlier education stages and longer-horizon follow-up
CO-2 (private)	Welfare-linked entry point via psychological services; broad characterisation procedures; guaranteed sign-language interpreters	Consolidated interdisciplinary team supporting policy delivery	Need to unify language and procedures; insufficient systematisation of support data
CO-3 (private)	Normalised protocols across campuses; inclusive higher-education programme; digital accessibility hub	Protocol system spanning multiple sites suggests policy scaling capacity	Persistent attitudinal barriers and the need for deeper staff sensitisation
CO-4 (public)	Institutional inclusion route; formal agreement (2015); specialised centre-led delivery; non-discrimination certification pathway	Centre leadership and certification mechanisms as stabilising policy devices	Need for stronger resourcing for visual disability supports and specialised staff training

Note: “Policy anchors” refer to internal agreements, observatories, institutional routes and protocol systems that define responsibilities and intended support standards. Case labels are anonymised and correspond to the case descriptions in Methods. Source basis: documents for formal structures, protocols and routes; interviews for delivery details and frictions; triangulation where sources converged.

3.2.3. Comparative Pattern (Policy Dimension)

Policy reliability increased where stable structures, routinised support routes and codified procedures assigned responsibility beyond individual goodwill. Administrative

rigidity, uneven procedural standardisation and limited staff training remained constraints in both case sets, although Mexican cases more often showed structured internal protocols and Colombian cases more often showed welfare-linked or networked support architectures.

3.3. Inclusive Practices (Mexico vs. Colombia)

3.3.1. Inclusive Practices in Mexican Universities

Mexican interviews and institutional documents linked practice to reasonable adjustments, assistive technologies, structured support and staff training. Reported actions included needs identification through standardised question sets, sign-language provision, sensitisation campaigns, academic accommodations and Universal Design for Learning in selected cases (Table 11).

Table 11. Inclusive practices in Mexican universities (cross-case practice profile).

Case	Practice Mechanisms (Pedagogical and Organisational)	Delivery Mode (How Practices Are Enacted)	Implementation Frictions (Practice-Side)
MX-1 (public)	Reasonable adjustments; assistive technologies; sensitisation campaigns; needs identification using the Washington Group set	Dedicated unit coordinates supports and adjustments	Staff attitudinal barriers; legacy infrastructure limiting accessibility
MX-2 (private)	Personalised accompaniment; sign language; workshops/courses; Universal Design for Learning embedded in the educational model	Inclusion mainstreamed via model-level commitments and routine support routes	Low visibility of the disability collective; need for deeper cross-faculty mainstreaming
MX-3 (private)	Diploma route for intellectual disability; accessibility committee; staff training (academic/administrative); reasonable adjustments	Specialised programme plus governance via a committee and continuous training	Limited dissemination of the unit's remit; faculty-level sensitisation gaps; bureaucratic constraints
MX-4 (public)	Inclusion programme; individualised adjustments; collaborative work across areas; teacher training	Flexible, inter-departmental model centred on individual follow-up	Need for more formalised processes; stronger identification of students with disabilities

Note: “Reasonable adjustments” denotes context-specific academic or organisational modifications intended to remove barriers without lowering academic standards. “Washington Group set” refers to structured functioning questions used for disability-related needs identification. Source basis: documents for formal structures, protocols and routes; interviews for delivery details and frictions; triangulation where sources converged.

3.3.2. Inclusive Practices in Colombian Universities

Colombian interviews located inclusive practice in interdisciplinary support systems connected to student welfare. Psychosocial accompaniment, institutional support routes, sign-language interpreters and adapted technologies depended on specific centres, observatories or programme units (Table 12).

Table 12. Inclusive practices in Colombian universities (cross-case practice profile).

Case	Practice Mechanisms (Pedagogical and Organisational)	Delivery Mode (How Practices Are Enacted)	Implementation Frictions (Practice-Side)
CO-1 (public)	Structured accompaniment route from admission to graduation; reasonable adjustments; disability validation procedures	Observatory-led model supporting continuity	Need for stronger articulation with pre-university education; longer-term follow-up
CO-2 (private)	Broad student characterisation; guaranteed sign-language interpreters at no cost; interdisciplinary support	Psychological services centre as the entry point coordinating supports	Need to unify procedures and language; limited systematisation of support data

Table 12. Cont.

Case	Practice Mechanisms (Pedagogical and Organisational)	Delivery Mode (How Practices Are Enacted)	Implementation Frictions (Practice-Side)
CO-3 (private)	Normalised protocols across campuses; psychosocial accompaniment; Universal Design for Learning; technology and infrastructure adaptation; digital accessibility hub	Multi-campus protocol system supporting standardisation	Persistent attitudinal barriers; need for further staff sensitisation
CO-4 (public)	Institutional inclusion route; accompaniment via specialised centre; “shadow” supports; interpreters; adapted technology; sensitisation campaigns	Centre-led model plus certification-oriented institutional reinforcement	Stronger resourcing for visual disability; specialised staff training; improved access to braille and assistive reading technologies

Note: Mexican Sign Language and Colombian Sign Language denote the national sign-language provision reported in cases. “Shadow supports” refers to designated support assistants accompanying students where barriers persist. Source basis: documents for formal structures, protocols and routes; interviews for delivery details and frictions; triangulation where sources converged.

3.3.3. Comparative Pattern (Practice Dimension)

Reasonable adjustments, accompaniment and sensitisation were more reliable when embedded in formal routes. Mexican cases more often displayed diversified portfolios linked to units or committees and institution-level learning models; Colombian cases more often relied on welfare-linked interdisciplinary accompaniment and campus protocols. Support remained uneven where practices were weakly standardised or concentrated in individual staff discretion.

3.4. Educational Trajectories (from Entry to Graduation)

3.4.1. Educational Trajectories in Mexican Universities

Mexican trajectory support began with identification and continued through adjustments, accessible resources and tailored accompaniment. The clearest entry mechanism was the Washington Group question set in MX-1; other cases emphasised personalised accompaniment, sign-language support or a dedicated diploma route for students with intellectual disability.

Continuity weakened where graduation-stage monitoring, faculty-level dissemination or formalised identification remained incomplete, leaving admission support without an equally explicit completion pathway.

3.4.2. Educational Trajectories in Colombian Universities

Colombian trajectory support was described through institutional routes with defined touchpoints and responsible units. One public case reported an accompaniment route from admission to graduation, anchored in an Inclusion Observatory and linked to reasonable adjustments and disability validation.

Welfare-linked entry points, psychological services, broad student characterisation and specialised centre-led support also structured trajectories across cases. Continuity challenges concentrated in transition from school to university, long-horizon follow-up and provision for students with visual impairment.

3.4.3. Comparative Pattern (Trajectory Dimension)

Trajectory stability depended on identifiable structures that connected entry, persistence and completion supports. Units, observatories and centres strengthened continuity when they linked accompaniment to explicit routes rather than isolated actions (Table 13).

Table 13. Educational trajectory supports across cases (admission to graduation).

Case	Entry and Identification (Admission-Stage)	Persistence Supports (During Study)	Completion/Exit Continuity (Towards Graduation)
MX-1	Needs identification using Washington Group set	Reasonable adjustments; assistive technologies; sensitisation actions	Continuity implied via dedicated-unit coordination
MX-2	Entry mechanism not specified; personalised accompaniment begins early	Sign-language support; workshops/courses; Universal Design for Learning embedded in educational model	Continuity implied via accompaniment model
MX-3	Programme route for intellectual disability (diploma)	Reasonable adjustments; accessibility committee; staff training	Continuity implied via programme route and committee
MX-4	Entry mechanism not specified; need for improved identification highlighted	Individualised adjustments; inter-area collaboration; teacher training	Continuity implied via individualised follow-up
CO-1	Formal route from admission to graduation; disability validation procedures	Reasonable adjustments within a structured pathway	Explicit admission-to-exit route reported
CO-2	Broad student characterisation via psychological services	Interdisciplinary supports; interpreters at no cost	Continuity constrained by need to systematise support data
CO-3	Protocol system spanning campuses (entry processes implied)	Psychosocial accompaniment; Universal Design for Learning; technology/infrastructure adaptation	Continuity implied via standardised protocols across sites
CO-4	Route anchored in a specialised centre; early-stage linkage noted	“Shadow” supports; interpreters; adapted technology; sensitisation campaigns	Continuity implied via centre-led route and institutional agreement

Note: “Shadow supports” refers to designated support assistants accompanying students where barriers persist. “Implied” means that continuity is described through ongoing supports or routes but not explicitly reported as a discrete stage in the source material. Case labels are anonymised and correspond to the case descriptions in Methods.

3.5. Advances and Challenges (Mexico vs. Colombia)

3.5.1. Convergent Advances (Shared Across Both Countries)

National legal frameworks and institutional declarations gave both case sets an ethical and normative basis for inclusion. Documents and interviews also showed institutional routes, specialised units or committees, adapted technologies and sensitisation or training activities in both countries.

3.5.2. Convergent Challenges (Shared Across Both Countries)

Limited staff preparation in accessibility, administrative rigidity and ableist attitudes recurred across contexts and inhibited consistent implementation. Documents and interviews also indicated weak systematisation of impact indicators, incomplete long-term follow-up and uneven standardisation of procedures.

3.5.3. Divergent Patterns by National Case Set

Institutionalisation marked the main divergence: Mexican cases showed clearer internal policies, defined protocols and systematic accompaniment structures, while Colombian

cases showed stronger dependence on local initiatives, welfare-linked services or networked support arrangements (Table 14).

Table 14. Advances and challenges across cases: convergences and divergences (Mexico vs. Colombia).

Analytic Focus	Convergences (Shared Across Both Contexts)	Divergences (Patterns More Prominent in Either Case Set)
Advances	Normative and ethical recognition of inclusion; identifiable institutional actors (units/programmes/observatories) coordinating supports.	Mexico: higher institutionalisation with codified policies, defined protocols, and systematic accompaniment. Colombia: advances present but more unevenly embedded across the institution.
Challenges	Limited staff preparation in accessibility; administrative rigidity; persistent ableist attitudes.	Mexico: residual constraints linked to legacy infrastructure and uneven dissemination/visibility of disability-focused supports across faculties. Colombia: fragmented implementation, procedural heterogeneity, and resourcing gaps for specific disability profiles (e.g., visual disability supports).
Sustainability	Progress appeared fragile when it relied on individual initiatives rather than consolidated structures.	Mexico: greater structural consolidation was associated with continuity. Colombia: dependence on dispersed actions was associated with variability and weaker continuity.

Note: “Institutionalisation” denotes stable structures, defined protocols or routes, and routinised support mechanisms that persist beyond individual champions. The convergence/divergence statements derive from the cross-case coding synthesis. Source basis: documents for formal structures, protocols and routes; interviews for delivery details and frictions; triangulation where sources converged.

3.6. Analytic Synthesis

Cases with aligned cultures, policies and practices showed more continuous support pathways than cases where initiatives remained detached from institutional routines.

Coherence Model for Inclusive Transformation

Figure 1 links three observed elements: institutional values and norms, formal rules and governance devices, and enacted pedagogical or organisational actions. Support from admission to completion was more sustained when these elements were connected; when they were not, inclusion remained episodic or dependent on individual goodwill.

Student recognition and shared responsibility defined the cultural component of the model. Values were strongest when tied to visible practices rather than confined to a single unit or office.

Internal agreements, guidelines and routes strengthened the policy component when they assigned responsibility through observatories, protocols or defined support pathways. Devices that connected decisions to routine practice were more stabilising than declarative commitments.

Teaching staff, support teams and administrative personnel strengthened practice when they delivered reasonable adjustments, accompaniment, technological accessibility and staff development through shared procedures. Uneven delivery appeared when those actions lacked a policy route or a culture of shared responsibility.

Mexican cases more often combined codified policies, defined protocols and systematic accompaniment structures; Colombian cases more often showed policies and practices that depended on local initiatives or welfare-linked services. Figure 1 represents this variation as the degree of alignment among values, governance instruments and enacted supports.

Inclusive transformation in universities depends on coherence between cultures, policies, and practices, which supports sustained educational trajectories

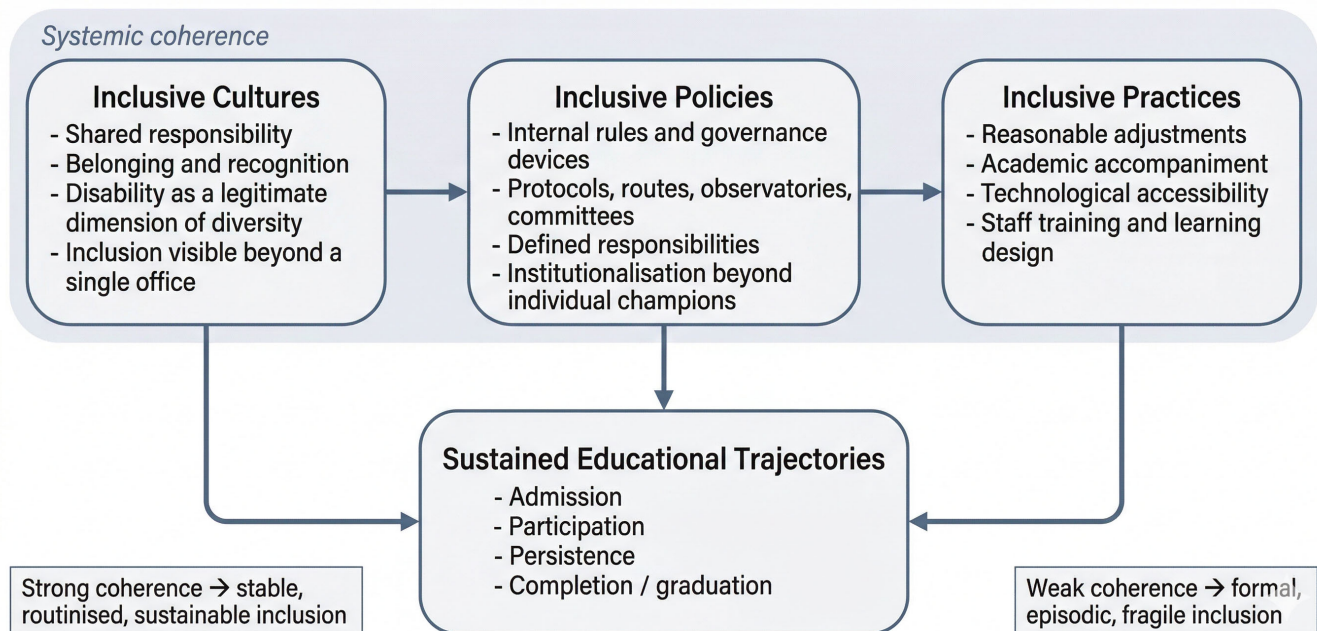


Figure 1. Coherence model for inclusive transformation in universities: alignment between culture, policies and practices as a condition for sustained educational trajectories for students with disabilities. The arrows indicate the direction of the conceptual relationships represented in the model: inclusive cultures inform policies, policies shape practices, and all three dimensions contribute to sustained educational trajectories. They represent analytical linkages derived from the qualitative synthesis rather than causal effects. **Note:** The model derives from grounded theory-informed axial and selective coding and cross-case comparison of documentary and interview data from eight universities in Mexico and Colombia. Variation is represented through the degree of alignment between institutional values, formal governance instruments (e.g., protocols/routes/observatories), and enacted supports (e.g., reasonable adjustments, accompaniment, technological accessibility and staff training).

4. Discussion

Rights-oriented commitments did not by themselves secure routine delivery. Implementation became fragile when culture, policy and practice operated as separate institutional layers rather than as connected responsibilities, a pattern consistent with whole-institution approaches to inclusion [9,10].

Specialist units and welfare offices stabilised support only when their work was connected to faculty-level responsibility. When inclusion remained concentrated in those offices, attitudinal barriers and uneven teaching practices could persist despite formal institutional commitment [35–37]. Disability-led strategy work makes the same institutional point by locating accessibility within sector governance rather than later individual accommodation [38]. Disability-rights frameworks similarly position accessibility as an institutional obligation rather than an individual exception [9,39].

Colombian policy obligations provided formal anchors for institutional routes [40], while Mexican institutional documents described guidelines and accessibility diagnoses that supported internal procedures [41,42]. In the selected cases, the Mexican materials were more often connected to committees, units and codified routes, whereas Colombian enactment more often depended on welfare-linked structures and campus-level coordination.

Reported supports—reasonable adjustments, accompaniment, sign-language provision, assistive technologies and staff sensitisation—match interventions described in recent

higher education evidence [31,43–48]. In these cases, support was weaker when delivered as isolated services and stronger when embedded in culture-policy-practice alignment [10].

Explicit routes and monitoring mechanisms supported more stable trajectories by linking entry, persistence and completion. Higher education trajectory research treats persistence as a pathway rather than a single access event [49], and inclusion mechanisms are more likely to protect that pathway when they remain available during disruption or resource pressure [16,50].

4.1. Governance, Accountability, and Resourcing as Implementation Conditions

Decision rights, coordinating structures and monitorable routines made inclusion less dependent on discretionary welfare logic. By connecting faculty-level action with service-level provision, these devices converted rights language into internal obligations consistent with rights-based and participation-oriented frameworks [9,10,38].

Disability support was more stable when its organisational location connected services with faculty-level decisions. Single-office concentration made accommodations more vulnerable to case-by-case negotiation, whereas formal routes with named responsibilities gave teaching staff, support teams and administrators a shared procedure to follow [44,45].

Accountability required indicators that record implementation, not only formal compliance. Access requests, adjustment decisions, time-to-provision, staff training completion, accessible learning materials and technology availability identify where participation is blocked and who must act [9,10,20].

Budget, procurement and maintenance decisions affected whether accessibility moved beyond goodwill. The cases highlighted technological accessibility, legacy infrastructure and specialist provision for particular impairment profiles; those barriers require resource allocation as well as policy intent [20,45,51,52].

Colombia's post-secondary legal framework strengthened formal duties [53], but universities still had to decide how those obligations applied to timetabling, assessment, digital platforms and available staff capacity. Translation into campus routines nevertheless remained variable.

The strongest Mexico–Colombia contrast in the selected cases concerned implementation reliability rather than normative disagreement. Formal routes and resource arrangements made support less dependent on individual discretion; the unresolved tension was how to combine standardised governance with individualised support.

4.2. Staff Capability, Pedagogy, and Attitudinal Barriers

Attitudinal and pedagogical routines made disability support appear exceptional rather than part of ordinary academic work. The pattern complements evidence on infrastructural and technological barriers [54,55] and aligns with studies documenting ableist barriers in higher education settings [9,43].

Staff capability belongs to governance and quality assurance. Reviews of inclusive higher education show that training is insufficient when detached from standards, accountability and pedagogical redesign [28,44,45,56].

Universal Design for Learning can reduce repeated negotiation of individual exceptions by moving accessibility into course design. Reasonable adjustments remain necessary, but proactive planning of teaching methods, materials, assessment options and digital environments can normalise access [10,21].

Training and Universal Design for Learning do not address ableist norms unless institutions also evaluate staff behaviour. The recurring failure points in this case set—limited accessibility preparation, administrative rigidity and discretionary responses by lecturers or programme units—mirror barriers reported in the wider literature [9,43–45,48].

Responsibility was clearer where routines made duties visible. Institutionalised routes connected staff decisions to clear procedures; fragmented implementation left staff discretion to determine whether students received timely adjustments [10,44].

4.3. Implications for Institutional Improvement and Implementable Actions

Universities can sustain inclusion when decision rights, standards, monitoring and resources are assigned to the same support route. The three levers connected to student trajectories are governance, staff capability and anti-discrimination mechanisms [9,10,38,44,45].

4.3.1. Governance Devices and Monitorable Routines

An institution-wide route can improve reliability when it specifies the disclosure or identification entry point, the decision pathway for reasonable adjustments, provision time-lines and escalation mechanisms. Protocols and national duties give the route its authority, but implementation depends on assigned roles and review cycles [40–42]. Participation frameworks also require that these procedures protect learning and campus life, not only formal access [9,10].

4.3.2. Monitoring Indicators That Prevent “Silent Exclusion”

Monitoring captures silent exclusion when it records barriers after admission. International and higher education indicator frameworks support tracking participation, attainment and accessibility-related indicators rather than relying on statements of commitment [9,14,20,57,58]. Disruption evidence also shows that vulnerable students can lose support when institutional routines are not maintained [16]. The indicators in Table 15 pair each implementation lever with a minimum measure and an ownership anchor.

Table 15. Implementation levers and minimum monitoring indicators for inclusive higher education (mapped to the coherence model).

Lever	Minimum Indicator	Ownership Anchor	Coherence Link
Inclusion route (entry → decision → provision → escalation)	Median time from request to decision; median time from decision to provision	Inclusion unit/observatory/centre; academic registry	Policy → Practice
Adjustment decision protocol (standard vs. case-reviewed adjustments)	Proportion of requests resolved under standard protocol; proportion escalated; refusal rate with justification	Academic affairs + inclusion unit	Policy → Practice
Accessibility standards for teaching/assessment	% of core materials meeting accessibility criteria; % of assessments with accessible alternatives	Programme directors; teaching and learning centre	Practice
Staff capability architecture (baseline + role-specific training)	Training completion rate by role; competency checks for key roles	Human Resources + teaching and learning centre	Culture → Practice
Anti-discrimination pathway (reporting and corrective action)	Number of reported incidents; resolution time; recurrence by unit	Student affairs + compliance/ombuds	Culture → Policy
Trajectory continuity (admission → progression → completion)	Attrition/progression differentials where data exist; service use and follow-up completion	Academic registry + inclusion unit	Practice → Outcome

Note: Indicators are intended to support corrective action rather than symbolic compliance. Human Resources is written in full in the table.

4.3.3. Staff Capability and Universal Design for Learning as Upstream Implementation Mechanisms

Sensitisation alone produced uneven gains when standards and accountability were absent—a pattern also reported in higher education reviews [28,44,45,56]. A staff capability model would combine baseline training, role-specific modules for programme leaders and teaching staff, and competency checks linked to teaching quality systems. Universal Design for Learning would then function as a design baseline rather than a voluntary initiative [10]. Anti-discrimination systems must also define reporting channels, review procedures and corrective actions for ableist incidents [9,43].

4.3.4. Resourcing and Accessibility as Governance Decisions

Assistive technologies, digital accessibility and legacy infrastructure require budget lines, procurement rules and maintenance cycles tied to explicit standards. Placing those decisions inside institutional budgeting and capital planning would reduce the risk that accessibility remains a welfare-office responsibility [20,45,51,52].

5. Limitations

The evidence base comprised one professional key informant per case university and 15 documentary materials, supporting analysis of governance and institutional routines but not capturing the full lived experience of students with disabilities, teaching staff, families or frontline administrative personnel.

Purposive criterion-based sampling provided comparative depth across eight cases without statistical representation of higher education systems in Mexico or Colombia; the Mexico–Colombia contrasts describe patterns within the selected case set.

Institutional informants may have emphasised formal achievements or established procedures. Triangulation with documents reduced, but did not remove, the risk of social desirability and institutional self-presentation bias. The study also did not measure longitudinal student outcomes, retention, attainment or post-graduation effects; it identified mechanisms associated with reported trajectory support.

6. Conclusions

Rights-based commitments became sustainable only when supported by reliable institutional routines. In the selected cases, stronger inclusion appeared where universities aligned inclusive cultures, codified governance routes and routine practices such as reasonable adjustments, accompaniment, accessibility technologies and staff capability systems.

Mexico–Colombia differences reflected the degree and form of institutionalisation within the selected cases. Clearer internal standards, stable coordinating structures and monitorable routines supported continuity across student trajectories, whereas fragmented implementation produced greater variability in provision and weaker systematisation.

Three levers emerge from the case synthesis: (i) a university-wide inclusion route linking entry, adjustment decisions, timelines and escalation; (ii) a minimum monitoring set addressing time-to-adjustment, completion, accessible core materials and incident resolution; and (iii) staff capability systems connected to teaching quality and budgeted accessibility provision.

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Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all participants involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: De-identified materials supporting the qualitative analysis may be made available by the corresponding author upon reasonable request, subject to ethical approval conditions, consent restrictions and institutional confidentiality requirements.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Appendix A

Appendix A.1. Study Procedures and Consent Information

Informants received an information sheet for the semi-structured interview “Inclusive Higher Education: A Comparative Analysis of Institutional Strategies and Programmes in Latin America (Mexico–Colombia)”. The expected interview duration was approximately 45 min. Audio or video recording was used only when explicit authorisation was provided and only for transcription, qualitative analysis and academic dissemination. The information collected concerned professional role, institutional practices and experiences related to inclusive higher education; reporting excludes personal names and case-institution identifiers.

Appendix A.2. Ethical Framework and Data Protection

The consent process specified voluntary participation, the right to withdraw without penalty, minimal risk, absence of financial compensation or incentives, pseudonymisation through anonymous participant identifiers, restricted access to recordings, anonymised use of excerpts and data retention limited to the research period. Data processing followed applicable data-protection frameworks in Colombia and Mexico, including Statutory Law 1581 of 2012 in Colombia and the Federal Law on the Protection of Personal Data Held by Private Parties in Mexico.

Appendix A.3. Consent Confirmation

Before participation, informants confirmed that they had read and understood the study information, had the opportunity to ask questions, agreed voluntarily to participate, and authorised the research team to collect, process, analyse and use the information exclusively for academic and scientific purposes. Recording authorisation was requested separately from study participation.

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