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# Monitoring inclusive education in Chile: Differences between urban and rural areas

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ABSTRACT

Rural education systems have higher barriers to inclusion than their urban counterparts. An observational, analytic cross-sectional study was performed. A self-report survey was collected from inclusive program coordinators, to examine differences between the coordinators' perception of program performance and the standards defined by public policy. Significant differences between urban and rural schools were found in terms of accessibility issues. Moreover, rural school integration programs have a lower probability of providing adapted resources or sign language interpreters. Public policies have been unable to ensure equal education for children with disabilities living in rural areas.



## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Rurality and rural education in Chile

Thirteen percent of the Chilean population lives in rural sectors, comprising an estimated 2,276,604 inhabitants (INE, 2016). In Chile, rurality is associated with the processes of exclusion and impoverishment. For example, the poverty rate is 27.9% in rural areas, but only 12.4% in urban areas. In other words, 1 in 4 rural households are below the poverty line. Moreover, according to the Chilean Socioeconomic Characterization Survey (Spanish acronym CASEN), the percentage of people living in extreme poverty is 9.6% in rural areas versus 3.8% in urban areas (Ministerio de Desarrollo Social, 2013).

The 2013 CASEN survey collected data about persons who had difficulty performing activities of daily living due to their health status. In terms of education, the survey found that people with disabilities had the highest illiteracy rate in all age groups over 15 years, the lowest average years of education (11.3 for the general population versus 8.3 for the population with disabilities), and the lowest rates of education; 9.1% of persons with disabilities over the age of 19 years had no formal education. Persons with disabilities also had lower attendance levels during elementary and high school, at 80.2% versus 85.8% for the general population.

In terms of the quality of rural elementary education, a study carried out in 2005 (Gallegos et al., 2007) shows that public education costs 30% more per student in rural versus urban zones, due to smaller facilities and student bodies. In terms of academic results on standardized national tests, rural students in every socioeconomic group have shown lower scores than urban students, with the greatest results gap in the highest socioeconomic level. The authors proposed that this difference is likely attributable to socioeconomic disadvantages, especially due to differences in school size and quality, rather than a direct effect of the rural setting. With regard to the administrative dependence of educational establishments, Gallegos et al. (2007) reported that public schools are the main elementary education offering in rural zones, rather than private subsidized schools. Several studies have found that there are no significant differences between the two school systems in terms of administrative management, and in many instances, any small differences favored the public schools (Castillo et al., 2011).

A study conducted in 5 Latin American countries reported differences between rural and urban educational systems in terms of the implementation of inclusive education; the percentage of regular urban schools that enroll students with disabilities is significantly higher than the percentage of regular rural schools that do so (UNESCO, 2013).

Data from Spain also suggest that rural schools tend to perpetuate segregation rather than promoting inclusion. These findings could be related to confusion among teachers and

*Abbreviations:* CASEN, socioeconomic characterization survey; PIE, school integration program; CRPD, convention on the rights of persons with disabilities.

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administrators regarding the distinctions between full inclusion versus integration based on traditional methods involving regular and "special" classrooms, despite relevant training and favorable dispositions of teachers to inclusive education (Callado et al., 2015)

### 1.2. The right to inclusive education

Education is a right extolled by various international instruments (UNESCO, 1960; UNICEF, 2006). The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) emphasized education as a universal right, adding the concept of reasonable accommodations to the UN's normative framework on education (UN, 2006). Inclusive education refers to the inalienable right of every person to full participation in quality education, allowing for maximum personal development and social integration. Within this framework, the diversity of the student body is a central focus in the curriculum development process. Equality, that is, avoiding discrimination and providing the same opportunities to all, is an imperative value in inclusive education. Inclusion should take place within the everyday environment of the school whenever possible, with the goal of achieving harmony, participation, and cooperation within the education community. The curriculum and school setting should be specifically adapted to the individual needs of each person to create a meaningful, constructive, cooperative, and reflective learning process. Finally, inclusive education implies fostering social values such as respect for, appreciation, cultivation, and celebration of diversity and solidarity. Inclusive education is a necessary first step towards an inclusion-based culture and ultimately an inclusive society. Therefore, a true education must be inclusive; otherwise, it is not an education at all (López-Torrijo and Mengual-Andrés, 2014).

The concept of "education for all" is based on the idea of rights; that is, "the human rights model of disability"–institutionalized by the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)–does appreciate the value of the social model of disability by acknowledging that disability is socially constructed (Gordon, 2013). This framework positions social inclusion as a human right, in which inclusive actions must go beyond providing benefits or therapies and extend to ensuring the freedom of persons with disabilities to exercise all of their rights (Padilla-Muñoz, 2010). Complementary reasons to support inclusive education include various benefits to society; improved education for persons with disabilities can be expected to increase economic productivity, reduce poverty, and enhance social inclusion (Bines and Lei, 2011).

Most countries, in theory, embrace the principles of inclusive education as "the most effective means of building an inclusive society and achieving education for all" (UNESCO, 1994); however, in 2005, the majority of children with disabilities in Europe remained in special rather than regular schools (Sentenac et al., 2013).

### 1.3. The school integration program in Chile

The Chilean School Integration Program (Spanish acronym PIE) was adopted in the 1990s as a strategy to improve the quality of education, with a particular emphasis on facilitating the presence and participation of students with disabilities (Government of Chile, 2009). This program is promoted by the Ministry of Education and is incorporated voluntarily by public schools and other schools that receive public funds. The aim is to assign additional resources to facilitation integration of students with disabilities into the school system, thus favoring their presence and participation in the classroom as well as supporting the achievement of learning objectives and the educational path of "every student." The initiate therefore contributes to continuous quality improvement for school-based education (Government of Chile, 2009).

This program is the most significant policy on inclusion of students with disabilities ratified by the Chilean government to date. In implementing this policy, the state provided supplementary human resources and materials to schools (Marfán et al., 2013), guaranteeing the availability of regular teachers, special education teachers, professional teaching assistants, and speech pathologists as needed to contribute to each child's learning (Government of Chile, 2012).

Advancing further along the path towards inclusive education, the Chilean Ministry of Education issued Decree N°83/2015. This law established curriculum and evaluation criteria for schools to use in developing their preschool and elementary programs. Importantly, this decree finally mandated that students with disabilities would be able to access, participate in, and progress along the learning process under conditions similar to those of their peers. In an optimal situation, an education system will provide all students with the opportunity to develop as free individuals who are aware of their own dignity and status as right-holders. Criteria for curriculum development can facilitate this process by providing the impetus for national reformations aimed at improving access for students with special educational needs, with explicit educational objectives stipulated in the legal framework (Government of Chile, 2015). PIE allocates resources for elements such as: 1) human resources, 2) coordination, work team, and evaluation, 3) professional training, and 4) material resources (Government of Chile, 2009).

Accessibility has become a key principle in the pursuit of greater inclusion and social justice. Farrington and Farrington (2005) note that "greater social justice cannot be achieved without greater social inclusion, which requires that people have access to a range of activities regarded as typical of their society; greater social inclusion requires greater accessibility," defined as "the ability of people to reach and engage in opportunities and activities" (Farrington and Farrington, 2005), which is often challenging in the rural context.

The CRPD emphasized two key concepts–barriers and supports–that affect students' ability to fully exercise their right to a quality education. Barriers refer to aspects of the social context, including customs, policies, and practices, that pose significant obstacles to learning or full participation for persons with disabilities (UNESCO, 2013). Supports, on the other hand, are human or other resources that facilitate or complement the teachers' instruction to ensure that the educational needs of all students are met, with special attention for those who require extra assistance to optimize their development, participate with their peers, and advance in their learning (UNESCO, 2000).

Chile has taken many steps towards inclusive education in regular schools. Although the School Integration Program was originally based on the now outmoded integration perspective, Chilean ratification of the CRPD in 2008 and passage of Law 20.422 (Government of Chile, 2010) have helped to advance Chilean schools towards full inclusion. Exploring the expression of this policy in rural Chilean areas is an innovative exercise.

The aim of this study was to characterize the School Integration Program in Chile in terms of accessibility, support services, institutional aspects, learning and teaching strategies, and participation of the school community, providing a preliminary analysis of the risk of inability to access inclusive education in rural schools.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Study design

An analytic, quantitative, cross-sectional design was performed.

### 2.2. Participants

An online self-report survey was sent to the email address of each PIE coordinator registered by the Chilean Ministry of Education, available on the website (www.mineduc.gob.cl). This phone number database only includes public and subsidized private schools, as fully private schools do not participate in the PIE program. The survey was sent in August, 2014 to each PIE coordinator at every registered school that has implemented PIE (4851 schools). After two weeks, the same coordinators were contacted by telephone and resent the instrument. The responses were codified and stored. A total of 1742 valid questionnaires were received, achieving the estimated sample size (356 schools) with a 95% confidence interval and 5% margin of error (Vivanco, 2005). This study was approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of Chile School of Medicine.

### 2.3. Instruments

The online questionnaire was reviewed by a committee of experts and then piloted with a group of coordinators with similar characteristics as the universe of participants. The questionnaire included questions about schools, such as type of school (public/mixed/other), region, and district. The rurality/urbanity of each school was classified according Ministry of Education criteria. Implementation of PIE was evaluated along eleven dimensions related to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, grouped into four areas 1) accessibility and support services 2) institutional elements, 3) learning and teaching strategies, and 4) participation of the school community. The questions formats included in this study were: a) multiple-choice questions (region); b) 5-point Likert scale responses to statements (never/hardly ever/sometimes/almost always/always); and c) closed-ended questions with dichotomous response options (yes/no; municipal/private-subsidized; urban/rural).

### 2.4. Data analysis

The data were subjected to a frequency analysis and measures of central tendency, and a $X^2$ test was used to determine differences between the groups, with the cutoff for significance set at $p < 0.05$. We conducted a multivariable logistic regression to adjust for type of school (public/mixed/other), year of school, poverty rate by income (Ministerio de Desarrollo Social, 2013) and development level of the district, evaluated according to district HDI (Human Development Index) (UNDP, United Nations Development Programme, Spanish acronym PNUD, Chile, 2006). Associations are expressed as an odds ratio (OR) and 95% CI. All p-values are reported to two decimal places, and statistical significance is defined as a two-sided p-value $\leq 0.05$. All responses were analyzed using the IBM Corp. Released 2010. IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows, Version 19.0. Armonk, NY: IBM Corp.

## 3. Results

### 3.1. Sample description

Of the 1742 questionnaires answered, 439 (25.2%) corresponded to schools in rural areas. Based on institutional reports, rural areas have lower levels of development (PNUD, 2009) and higher levels of poverty (Ministerio de Desarrollo Social, 2013). Poverty was evaluated according to familial income level (Ministerio de Desarrollo Social, 2013). The comparisons between rural and urban areas are presented in Table 1. Of the total validated surveys, 63.1% of responses correspond to public schools (Table 1).

**Table 1**
Sample description.

| Aspect | Urban | Rural |
|---|---|---|
| Responses (n) | 1303 | 439 |
| District HDI Mean | 0.72 (0.719–0.725) | 0.67 (0.674–0.683) |
| Mean (95% Linf-Lsup) | | |
| Poverty[a] | 16.37 (15.89–16.86) | 22.8 (21.9–23.6) |
| % (95% Linf-Lsup) | | |
| Public School% (n) | 56.5 (736) | 82.7 (363) |
| Private subsidized School% (n) | 43.4 (566) | 17.7 (75) |
| Other% (n) | 0.1 (1) | 0.2 (1) |

HDI: Human Development Index.
[a] Poverty: Poverty rate estimated by income (Ministerio de Desarrollo Social, 2013).

### 3.2. Implementation of PIE in rural versus urban areas

In terms of accessibility, in rural areas, 55.1% of PIE coordinators reported that their school had an accessibility plan to accommodate entry into as well as circulation throughout the building and use of facility equipment and infrastructure. The figure for the urban zones was similar, at 55.6% ($p = 0.447$). However, only 37.4% of rural schools had adaptive equipment or furniture available for working with students with disabilities, versus 43.0% in the urban sector. This difference was statistically significant ($p = 0.022$).

Resource rooms for special group or individual activities were available in 89.7% of rural schools, versus 96.8% of urban schools ($p = 0.001$).

On the other hand, supportive materials and services for students with sensory disabilities, such as Braille materials and audiobooks have been implemented in less than 20% of schools in rural and urban schools. Moreover, sign language interpreters were available in 25.4% of urban versus 17.3% of rural schools ($p = 0.001$) (Table 2).

A statistically significant association was found ($p = 0.001$) between area (urban/rural) and explicit declaration of school inclusiveness, with 98.2% of rural coordinators reporting that their school is explicitly inclusive versus 92.5% of urban coordinators. Conversely, urban coordinators reported a much more positive perception than rural coordinators regarding institutional promotion of teacher training on inclusion issues (Table 2).

Regarding curriculum, we found no significant differences between schools in rural and urban areas. Coordinators in both areas agreed that the needs of students with disabilities are considered in the planning, implementation and evaluation of educational activities (Table 3). Coordinators in both areas also reported that the PIE professionals and other teachers work together collaboratively. However, rural coordinators were more likely than urban coordinators to report that recommendations for professional support are followed ($p = 0.031$) (Table 3).

### 3.3. Participation of the school community in PIE

In terms of opportunities for students with disabilities, PIE coordinators in rural schools expressed more agreement that the activities in their establishments are designed to allow for the participation of all students without restrictions. In terms of effective participation, 93.4% of rural coordinators reported that students with disabilities were *always* or *almost always* able to participate in schoolwork without restrictions with the rest of their peers. The figure for the urban sector was lower, at 71.0%. Regarding family participation, no significant differences between urban and rural areas were found. More than half of the PIE coordinators agreed that the family is able to participate in planning and evaluation of program results (Table 4). It is noteworthy that for all family participation dimensions evaluated, positive assessments (responses of 'almost every time' or "every time") were more likely to be reported in rural versus urban areas.

**Table 2**
Accessibility and institutional aspects of PIE.

| Aspect | Topic | Responses[b] | Urban Area n (%) | Rural Area n (%) | P value |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Accessibility | Accessibility plan in the school | Yes | 725 (55.6) | 242 (55.1) | 0.447 |
| | Adapted or Inclusive furniture | Yes | 560 (43.0) | 164 (37.4) | 0.022[a] |
| | Resource rooms for collective or individual activities | Yes | 1261 (96.8) | 394 (89.7) | 0.001[a] |
| | Braille system implemented | Yes | 109 (8.4) | 31 (7.1) | 0.223 |
| | Audiobooks | Yes | 247 (19.0) | 77 (17.5) | 0.280 |
| | Training in sign language | Yes | 331 (25.4) | 76 (17.3) | 0.001[a] |
| Institutional | Institutional declaration to inclusion | Yes | 1205 (92.5) | 431 (98.2) | 0.001[a] |
| | Teacher training in social inclusion, promoted by School Administer | Yes | 813 (62.4) | 235 (53.5) | 0.001[a] |

[a] Statistically significant difference based in chi-square ($x^2$).
[b] The alternative answers were "Yes" and "No".

**Table 3**
Learning and teaching strategy aspects of PIE.

| Aspect | Question | Value | Urban Area. n (%) | Rural Area n (%) | P value |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Curricular aspects | Children with disabilities used to stay inside of classroom. | N° | 1225 (94) | 408 (92.9) | 0.242 |
| | Activities in Resource room are related to classroom activities | –[b] | 78 (6.0) | 28 (6.4) | 0.490 |
| | | + | 1014 (77.8) | 339 (77.2) | |
| | Supplementary time for children with disabilities | – | 143 (11.0) | 32 (7.3) | 0.099 |
| | | + | 1012 (77.7) | 345 (79.5) | |
| | Evaluations adjust teaching schedule and planning | – | 73 (5.6) | 18 (4.1) | 0.318 |
| | | + | 1075 (82.5) | 373 (84.9) | |
| | Learning of children with disabilities is evaluated by adapting tools and demand of content and requirements of children | – | 55 (4.2) | 16 (3.6) | 0.504 |
| | | + | 1089 (83.6) | 381 (86.8) | |
| | Planning of lessons is directed to improve learning of students. | – | 32 (2.4) | 6 (1.3) | 0.130 |
| | | + | 1227 (94.2) | 425 (96.8) | |
| | Individual and collective activities are planned to reinforce contents and abilities, improving access to curriculum. | – | 91 (7.0) | 28 (6.3) | 0.268 |
| | | + | 1013 (77.8) | 335 (76.3) | |
| Interdisciplinary work | Lessons are planned and prepared by teachers and PIE's professionals | – | 72 (5.6) | 18 (4.1) | 0.257 |
| | | + | 1093 (83.8) | 386 (87.9) | |
| | PIE's professionals recommendations are included in learning | – | 44 (3.4) | 11 (2.5) | 0.031[a] |
| | | + | 1113 (85.5) | 373 (89.5) | |

N°= number of responses.
[a] Statistically significant difference based in chi-square ($x^2$).
[b] (–) Never or Almost never/(+) Almost every time or Every time.

Overall, there was a significant difference in favor of rural areas in terms of the school community's promotion of social inclusion of students with disabilities.

### *3.4. Association between rurality and PIE implementation*

Two multivariable logistic regression were performed to adjust for school and district characteristics that reflected significant bivariate associations (chi-square analysis) between PIE implementation and rurality/urbanity. Only accessibility and institutional issues showed significant associations. Schools in the rural sector were less likely to, provide adapted or inclusive furniture and sign language interpreters; conversely institutional promotion of social inclusion was greater in rural schools. These results are shown in Table 5.

## 4. Discussion

An education system can become more inclusive only when its regular schools become more inclusive; that is, when the schools effectively educate all children in the community (UNESCO, 2013).

When comparing urban and rural schools Chile, a significant gap in School Integration Program implementation becomes apparent, in terms of mobility accommodations, special educational materials, resource rooms, sign language interpretation, and strategies to facilitate inclusion. Inadequacies in this area negatively affect the school environment for all children, and students with disabilities in particular face decreased opportunities to participate in learning with their peers.

This study and others in the literature (Tikly and Barret, 2011; Le Fanu, 2014; Callado et al., 2015) provide evidence of unjust and avoidable gaps in educational opportunities and results for rural areas, especially in association with poverty (Azaola, 2014).

For some topics, results were similar for urban and rural areas, yet noteworthy. Both urban and rural schools reported low availability of materials to support the diversity of students with disabilities; nearly 45% of the facilities implementing the School Integration Program lacked accommodations for students with mobility impairments despite the legal obligation to provide such modifications. Moreover, both urban and rural schools showed low levels of compliance with accessibility plans to accommodate entry into and circulation throughout the building and use of

**Table 4**
Community participation in PIE.

| Aspect | Question | Value | Urban Area n (%) | Rural Area n (%) | P value |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Student Participation | Involvement of students with disabilities in student organizations | Yes | 559 (42.9) | 199 (45.3) | 0.203 |
| | Activities are planned for participation every students without restriction | –[b] | 46 (3.6) | 10 (2.3) | 0.024[a] |
| | | + | 1275 (91.2) | 410 (93.4) | |
| | Students with disabilities participate without restrictions in school with their peers | – | 55 (4.3) | 15 (3.5) | 0.150 |
| | | + | 1186 (71.0) | 410 (93.4) | |
| | PIE'S professionals listen to the views of students with disabilities to provide assistance to their needs. | – | 42 (3.3) | 11 (2.5) | 0.975 |
| | | + | 1222 (94.0) | 415 (94.5) | |
| | The planning of activities takes into account the opinion the interest of students. | – | 105 (8.0) | 30 (6.8) | 0.633 |
| | | + | 895 (70.7) | 315 (71.7) | |
| Family participation | Family view is taken into account in planning educational processes. | – | 168 (12.9) | 46 (10.5) | 0.323 |
| | | + | 802 (61.6) | 291 (66.2) | |
| | The planning of activities takes information collected from the community | – | 228 (17.5) | 65 (14.8) | 0.330 |
| | | + | 710 (54.5) | 251 (57.2) | |
| | Families are informed about the PIE results. | – | 27 (2.1) | 4 (0.9) | 0.398 |
| | | + | 1263 (96.9) | 429 (97.8) | |
| | The work done at school complements the work done by the family and community outside the establishment. | – | 183 (14.1) | 48 (11.0) | 0.119 |
| | | + | 701 (53.5) | 261 (59.5) | |
| | School is active in the community promoting social inclusion of students with disabilities. | – | 293 (22.5) | 66 (15.1) | 0.001[a] |
| | | + | 936 (71.8) | 357 (81.3) | |

[a] Statistically significant difference based in chi-square ($x^2$).
[b] (–) Never or Almost never/(+) Almost every time or Every time.

**Table 5**
Association between rurality and PIE implementation (logistic regression model).

| Topic | Odd ratio IC 95% (LI–LS) | P value |
|---|---|---|
| Adapted or inclusive furniture | 0.732 (0.551–0.971) | 0.034[a] |
| Resource rooms for collective or individual activities | 0.278 (0.179–0.432) | 0.007[a] |
| Training in sign language | 0.619 (0.469–0.817) | ,009[a] |
| School is active in the community promoting social inclusion of students with disabilities | 1.798 (1.259–2.569) | ,001[a] |
| Activities are planned for participation every students without restriction | 0.869 (0.427–1.766) | 0.697 |
| PIE's professionals recommendations are included in learning | 0.733 (0.331–1625) | 0.445 |
| Institutional declaration to inclusion | 4.349 (2.097–9.019) | 0.003[a] |
| Teacher training in social inclusion, promoted by School Administer | 0.696 (0.559–0.867) | 0.001[a] |

[a] Statistically significant difference in logistic regression model.

facility infrastructure, exacerbated in rural schools by particularly limited availability of adaptive furniture, adaptive equipment, and resource rooms. These findings complement the conclusions of Gottfried (2014). Both studies suggest a relationship between contextual factors and differential impact on the learning of students with and without disabilities. Identifying the learning requirements of each member of a classroom is necessary for truly integral learning.

Furthermore, less than 20% of facilities had Braille materials or audiobooks available, and less than half of the schools had staff trained in sign language, restricting the participation of students with auditory impairments, as well as the participation of parents or guardians who might have hearing impairments. For López-Torrijo and Mengual-Andrés (2014), a positive, constructive, supportive, and realistic attitude towards disability is an absolutely necessary component of any educational activity. Encouraging this attitude among persons with disabilities and their families as well

as among professionals (teachers, politicians) and finally, in society at large, is an essential prerequisite for an inclusive society (López-Torrijo and Mengual-Andrés, 2014).

Likewise, these results are consistent with logistic regression models. In general, rural and urban schools are similar in several areas of PIE implementation; nevertheless, rural schools present a lower probability of implementing the accessibility requirements of PIE, especially resource rooms and sign language training. On the other hand, rural schools show a greater probability of developing community activities to support institutional promotion of social inclusion.

Overall, these findings regarding the perception of School Integration Program coordinators suggest that advances towards an inclusive education is the result of collaborative work to plan inclusive educational activities among general education teachers and support professionals. In urban and rural sectors, various aspects of curriculum development promote planning, participation, evaluation, additional time, and other adjustments for students with disabilities. Additionally, over 80% of respondents reported that interdisciplinary work was performed addressed inclusion, with a significant difference in favor of the rural sector, including collaboration among regular teachers and School Integration Program support staff.

Prior studies have underlined the importance of community participation in achieving rural development (Arnove, 1973; Storey, 1999; Kenny et al., 2013; Heike and Lund, 2015). Our results suggest that at least 9 out of 10 schools are intended to be open to all students without restrictions. It is noteworthy that in all dimensions related to family participation, rural coordinators showed a greater tendency to respond “almost every time” or “every time” than urban coordinators. Table 5 indicates that school coordinators in rural schools were more likely to promote social inclusion of students with disabilities (OR 1.798 [1.26–2.57], $p < 0.001$). However, previous research has shown that parents of children with disabilities from lower socioeconomic levels report feeling intimidated or rejected by the schools (Lareau, 2000). Including parents in their children's education process is crucial, as their own connection to the education process can serve to promote social inclusion. Carolan-Silva (2011) noted that the parents interviewed for her study were eager to participate in meetings and openly share their opinions on matters related to the schools; however, the parents felt that in practice, their ability to influence their children's educational trajectory was limited. The parents reported that perceived barriers included their own insufficient academic knowledge, limitations related to their children's abilities and options, the family's precarious economic situation, and the scarcity of employment opportunities (Carolan-Silva, 2011).

The key to ensuring that children with disabilities can fully exercise their rights is ensuring that children have access to full and effective participation and inclusion in society, a principle highlighted by the CRPD (UN, 2006). Working to provide accessible educational activities and environments contributes to creating a more inclusive and participatory educational culture.

Chile has made advances towards educational inclusion thanks to the School Integration Program. This country, however, has fallen far short of meeting its obligations as a ratifying nation of the CRPD (UN, 2006). The Chilean school system has failed to ensure reasonable accommodations for the individual needs of each student, the support necessary to ensure maximum academic development, or the affirmative actions needed to guarantee effective inclusion of all students with disabilities.

Education is the first stage of the inclusion process. Inclusive classrooms transform society, empower an inclusive culture, and develop a society that values and respects differences. Therefore, it is important to facilitate inclusive preschool and elementary education in rural areas, so that children can access education in their own community. This element is key to later inclusion in work and society. We might imagine inclusion as a train with three cars: the first is educational inclusion, the second work inclusion, and the third social inclusion; if the State and society put in the necessary effort to propel the first car, the train can go forward. For the train to advance smoothly, it also needs strong rails: accessibility.

## 5. Conclusion

Ensuring optimal development of all persons, especially children, is not only a legal but an ethical obligation of every nation. This development should not be limited by discrimination based on economic situation, ethnic group, disability, or geographic area of origin.

Accessibility, teacher support, and the participation of students and their families are fundamental pillars for advancing towards a fully inclusive education. Developing inclusive spaces in rural communities is a challenge that our country must address. It is urgent that our society find ways to facilitate inclusive participation, learning, and culture, especially in areas that are disadvantaged in terms of opportunities and access to quality education. “Education for all means having a legislative body and policies that reflect respect for diversity; an education system that is accessible and adaptable to ensure access, participation, and learning for students with disabilities under conditions similar to those of their peers; and support systems aimed at preventing and overcoming barriers to participation or learning” (UNESCO, 2013).

One limitation of this study is the sampling method. While we achieved a high rate of participation among PIE coordinators, the sample was not random. Because participation was voluntary, there may be a bias related to the responders' interest in completing the questionnaire. In addition, as administrators, the program coordinators' responses may not reflect the opinions of other members of the education community such as parents, teachers, and students.

Further research to explore the viewpoints of other players in the education process, especially the children, would be beneficial. Gathering information on children with disabilities who are excluded from the education system due to living in a rural area is another important topic for future research.

This research provides a comparison between urban and rural implementation of an inclusive education program in Chile. The data contribute to identify relevant areas that explain the gap between both. These challenges could define the effectiveness of the policy itself, due to an accurate diagnosis in public policy would improve their performance of public effort to ensuring equal opportunities for children with disabilities.

Inclusive education is a challenge for every country. As part of confronting this challenge, it is important to acknowledge the enormous gaps between urban and rural sectors. When these gaps are well-characterized, we are able to identify targets for public policy intervention and affirmative actions to remedy the inequalities.

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