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Inclusive Education and the Use of Assistive Technologies: A Systematic Review

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Abstract
The increase in the frequency and quality of educational technology use is notable. However, studies are needed to analyze scientific production regarding the use of assistive technologies in inclusive education in Latin America. This work aims to contribute to the consolidation of educational innovations for students with visual impairments by reviewing scientific publications that address assistive technology. This study uses hermeneutics and bibliometrics to identify contributions to assistive technology. The PRISMA methodology was used to select the corpus. Eighty-six scientific articles published in English or Spanish between 2015 and 2025 and available in the Scopus, Web of Science, and Scielo databases were reviewed. The review concludes that screen readers, Braille, artificial intelligence, and augmented reality are the most commonly used assistive technologies for students with visual impairments.

Keywords: Innovation, Teachers, Disability, Educational Technology

1. Introduction

Inclusive education seeks to guarantee access, participation, and learning for all students, regardless of their individual, cultural, or social circumstances. Achieving this requires innovations in teaching practices, as they are a key factor that will enhance its effectiveness (Tovar, 2015).

Authors such as Robles et al. (2018) and Salazar and Mesa (2019) agree that digital accessibility in educational platforms guarantees adaptive and barrier-free learning environments. However, challenges persist in the quality of education and in the provision of adequate resources for students with visual impairments (Ocampo, 2018). In this regard, Alonso and Villafuerte-Holguín (2020) argue that there is a clear need for greater teacher training on strategies for promoting socio-educational inclusion and the implementation of curricular adaptations, but that the provision of technical and institutional support is also important. Alcaraz and Arnaiz (2020) mention that 83.2% of students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) are enrolled in mainstream classrooms, with an increase in special units and a reduction in cases of multiple disabilities in Spain. For their part, Valdés et al. (2023) state that inclusion in mainstream classrooms reached 70% coverage since 2017, as a result of the School Integration Program implemented in public schools in Chile. In the case of Ecuador, statistics report that 78% of children and young people with disabilities between the ages of 3 and 17 attend the mainstream education system, demonstrating a notable growth in the student population requiring inclusive education. Consequently, it is necessary to have research that addresses the niche related to the identification of assistive technology resources that have achieved relevant results in serving students with visual disabilities globally. To this end, the authors of this paper use hermeneutics and bibliometrics to identify scientific articles that address the topic of inclusive technology with an emphasis on working with students with visual impairments.

Using the PRISMA methodology, 86 scientific articles published in English or Spanish between 2015 and 2025 and available in the Scopus, Web of Science, and Scielo databases were selected. The terms used to conduct the literature search were: access, education, educational innovation, Ibero-America, educational inclusion, assistive technology, and educational technology. The selected publications were analyzed based on the following categories: (1) inclusive education and teaching practices, (2) Visual Impairment, and (3) Assistive technology.

The research questions guiding this research are:
1. What are the advances and challenges of inclusive education?
2. How are students with visual impairments served?
3. What is the contribution of assistive technologies to the educational process of students with visual impairments?

This research aims to contribute to the consolidation of educational innovations for students with visual impairments by reviewing scientific publications addressing assistive technology in the period 2015-2025.

2. Development

2.1. Inclusive Education and Teaching Practices

Teaching practices in inclusive education play a fundamental role, but the lack of training and institutional support limits their contribution (Villafuerte and Carreño, 2015). Thus, Castillo (2015) emphasizes the importance of comprehensive and humane academic preparation that enables teachers to address an increasingly complex and diverse educational reality. Victoriano (2017) emphasizes the need to work on selecting pedagogical strategies that contribute to improving coexistence in schools and help overcome communication barriers, while Sevilla et al. (2018) demonstrate that strengthening teaching competencies is necessary to advance toward inclusive and committed education that addresses the diversity of students and their families.

The work of researchers Huenul et al. (2016) and Carrasco (2018) agree that teaching practices face barriers such as a lack of accessible materials, adapted technology, and adequate infrastructure. The works of Hernández and Torres (2018), Rojas et al. (2018), Santa Cruz et al. (2021), and Gómez (2018) concur that teaching practices are more relevant when serving children and young people with visual impairments who report levels of stress and anxiety due to accessibility barriers and a lack of adapted methodologies. Meanwhile, Del Rio et al. (2018), Jimenez and Mesa (2020), and Bravo et al. (2021) confirm that physical and social barriers persist in educational centers and that these must be overcome to achieve full educational inclusion. Furthermore, collaboration between the school, the family, and the community will enable the success of inclusive education (Barrionuevo, 2020). For their part, Villafuerte and Cevallos (2021) state that leadership is a vital factor that must be strengthened in teaching practice as it enhances the management of educational centers. Furthermore, schools must transform their policies and capacities to successfully address interdisciplinarity in inclusive education (Párraga et al., 2021). Furthermore, Espinosa et al. (2021) propose a model of educational inclusion based on the experiences of students with disabilities, highlighting the contribution of internal and external attitudinal and social support.

However, the effectiveness of inclusive practices is not entirely complete since teacher training, which is a key factor in promoting adaptive learning, remains limited from the teachers' perspective (Lozano et al., 2021). For their part, Monge et al. (2021) determined that inclusion in higher education in Costa Rica is perceived as a moral imperative, but requires greater investment. In this context, policies and laws promoting social and educational inclusion are essential to overcome the identified weaknesses. Thus, Palmeros and Gairín (2016) and Pérez (2023) compared public policies developed in Mexico and Spain, determining that, although there has been progress in the regulations of both countries, their scope is limited due to a lack of resources and teacher training. In the university context, Ayala et al. (2023) confirm that inclusive education in Ecuadorian universities is not effectively implemented due to a lack of training and participation of its stakeholders, while Pérez (2023) identifies that the barriers that persist in higher education are pedagogical, physical, access to information, and attitudinal. Santillan and Villafuerte (2023) also concur, stating that the lack of infrastructure and training limits access to and development of teaching practices aimed at serving students with sensory, physical, or intellectual disabilities. While Delgado and Ponce (2023) point to neuroeducation as a possible solution because it promotes attention, motivation, and socio-emotional support, facilitating the integration of all students, including those with specific educational needs.

According to Ruiz (2024), there is a persistent absence of inclusive policies that strengthen teaching practices in the university classroom. At the same time, Rodríguez and García (2024) mention that public policies should be reviewed to improve social and educational inclusion by enhancing accessibility to friendlier educational environments, without this representing an additional burden on teaching practice. While Vargas et al. (2024) emphasize that students perceive serious deficiencies in the inclusive process, especially in public education institutions, and highlight the urgent need to improve teachers' skills and knowledge for the management of inclusive education. Finally, Balta et al. (2024) emphasize the urgency of promoting an inclusive culture that values diversity in the university educational environment and provides the resources required to enhance teaching practices in the context of higher education.

2.2. Visual Deficit and Impairment

For a better understanding of the fundamental concepts addressed in this research, it is indicated that the term visual deficit refers to a reduction in vision, while visual impairment refers to a more severe impairment (Lorenzo, 2017). According to Coneo (2019) and López and Vásquez (2022), visual impairment negatively affects academic performance, hindering text review, participation, and language development. Likewise, Cortés and Salas (2019) mention that visual impairment occurs when this condition significantly affects people's daily lives, preventing them from performing essential tasks without specialized support.

To address the challenges associated with visual impairment, it is essential to implement inclusion strategies and adaptations that enable equitable learning. This is supported by Parra and Peñas (2015) when they state that the counseling and emotional support provided through support and mentoring groups help students with visual impairments overcome social and emotional challenges. Angenscheidt and Navarrete (2017) and Duck et al. (2019) add that it is essential to train educators on inclusive practices and the use of adapted resources for serving students with visual impairments. Navarro et al. (2016) and Cruz et al. (2023) agree that teaching materials, methodologies, and technological tools in curricula need to be adapted.

Worldwide, 36 million people were blind in 2015, and 216.6 million had moderate to severe visual impairment, representing a 17.6% increase in blindness since 1990 due to population growth and aging (Rupert et al., 2017). Research conducted in Spain shows that the most common visual disorders are myopic maculopathy and ocular trauma (Menéndez and Castell, 2020). The World Health Organization (2019) states that visual impairment can be classified into four levels: mild, moderate, severe, and total blindness. This depends on visual acuity and the loss a person achieves in their visual field. According to Montoya and López (2022), visual impairment hinders learning and the development of cognitive and socioemotional skills in students of various ages. Consequently, it has a direct and negative influence on academic performance (Palma and Ponce, 2023). Meanwhile, the World Health Organization (2021) estimates that millions of people with visual impairments represent a challenge for inclusive education.

Visual impairment affects academic performance by making it difficult to acquire information in visually dependent educational environments. This is confirmed by Escudero and Castro (2023), who demonstrate that students with visual impairments face difficulties in reading, writing, and comprehension, exacerbated by the lack of adequate adaptations in the classroom. Therefore, visual impairment represents a significant challenge in the educational field, affecting both the learning process and the social integration of students who suffer from it. Therefore, Freire et al. (2024) state that this disability severely limits vision and cannot be fully corrected with glasses, surgery, or medical treatment. This condition ranges from a moderate reduction in vision to total blindness. According to the World Health Organization (2021), visual impairment is classified as low vision, which reports visual acuity between 6/18 and 3/60; and blindness, which has visual acuity less than 3/60 or a visual field less than 10 degrees.

2.3. Assistive Technology and Educational Processes

The implementation of assistive technology in educational settings has been shown to have a positive impact on the academic performance of students with visual impairments. In this regard, Beltrán et al. (2015) argue that it is essential to implement inclusion strategies and methodologies, such as assistive technologies and Braille teaching materials, to facilitate access to information for students with visual impairments.

Despite the benefits provided by assistive technology, students and their caregivers face a barrier to accessing these tools due to their high cost. Furthermore, the lack of adequate training among teaching staff on the use and integration of these assistive technologies can reduce their effectiveness. Pascuas (2015) indicates that only 35% of the teachers surveyed feel competent in using these tools to serve students with visual impairments. For his part, Viscaíno (2018) found that electronic Braille devices, which are part of assistive technology, can facilitate the learning of mathematics and science, traditionally challenging areas for these students. Pinoargote-Vera et al. (2018) affirm that the use of WhatsApp is considered a support tool for teaching students with visual impairments. On the other hand, Mogollon et al. (2019) indicate that collaboration between educational institutions, governments, and the community is essential to access and implement technological resources in educational centers.

Clavijo and Bautista (2020) explain that to strengthen educational inclusion in higher education institutions, it is essential to instruct faculty in the use of technological resources and incorporate actions aimed at improving the approach to diversity in all professional training programs. Furthermore, Bell (2020) points out that universities lack the tools and training to manage inclusion, which impedes the use of relevant intervention strategies. However, Yépez and Castillo (2020) state that despite the actions taken to raise awareness among members of Higher Education Institutions, student dissatisfaction persists due to the lack of attention to diversity. According to Hidalgo and Larco (2021), the actions of these institutions can lead to confusion between inclusion and regulatory compliance; therefore, progress in social justice, equity, and inclusion in universities is still weak.

Villafuerte and Pinoargote (2020) state that the use of computer applications in the context of university education can support students with progressive visual impairment in completing their tasks and socializing, increasing opportunities to achieve greater autonomy and improve academic performance. Furthermore, Oviedo et al. (2021), Sánchez and Sabando (2021) agree that mobility and orientation training allows students with visual impairments to develop safe mobility skills and achieve greater autonomy. These skills, combined with the use of assistive technology, enhance users' comprehension.

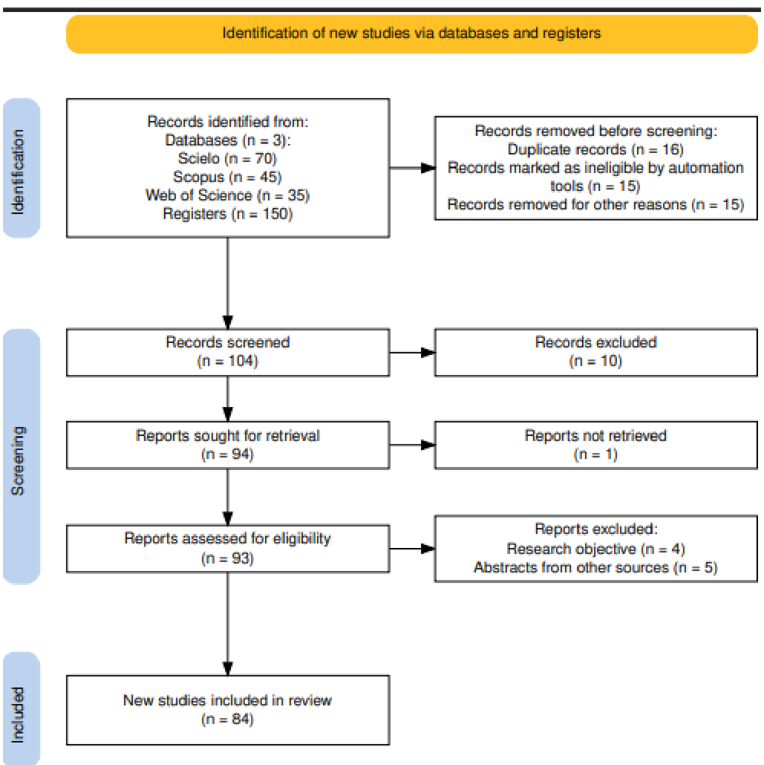
Assistive technology has emerged as an essential tool to facilitate learning for students with visual impairments in educational settings. Pérez and Reeves (2023) emphasize that assistive technologies are products or systems that enhance the capabilities of people with disabilities, facilitating equitable access to the educational curriculum. For Sánchez et al. (2024), assistive tools for visual impairments include traditional optical devices and digital solutions such as screen readers and electronic Braille. Therefore, Rivas (2024) implemented the use of screen readers and voice recognition software, significantly improving reading comprehension and written production in students with low vision. However, maximizing the benefits of assistive technology in the education of students with visual impairments requires the implementation of comprehensive strategies that address the aforementioned challenges. This confirms that ongoing teacher training in assistive technologies and collaboration between institutions and families are key to improving inclusive education. Furthermore, inclusive policies urgently need to fund these technologies, as they are essential to ensuring equity in access to learning (Sánchez et al., 2024).

3. Methodology

This bibliometric study uses the PRISMA method (Page et al., 2021) to ensure rigor in the corpus selection process. The selection criteria used are:
Type of documents: Scientific articles published in indexed journals.
Languages: Spanish and English.
Analysis period: 2015-2025
Databases consulted: Scopus, Web of Science, and Scielo.
Inclusion criteria: Exclusion criteria
Studies that address the use of assistive technologies in inclusive education. Documents that do not directly address educational inclusion.
Research focused on students with visual impairments. Opinion articles or reviews without data analysis.
Publications focused on educational innovation. Repeated studies or studies without full-text access.

3.1. Corpus Selection Procedure

1. Search the Scopus, Web of Science, and Scielo databases using the keywords inclusive education, assistive technologies, visual impairment, and educational accessibility.
2. Initially, 240 articles were selected, and after applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria, 86 scientific publications were obtained.
3. Publication patterns, most cited authors, journals with the highest impact, and trends in the use of assistive technologies were examined.
4. The publications were analyzed based on the research questions. Figure 1 shows the PRISMA diagram showing the corpus selection process.



3.2. Bibliometric Analysis Procedure

It identifies the main trends in scientific production on inclusive education and assistive technologies for students with visual impairments, applying indicators of scientific productivity, impact, and academic collaboration.
Scientific Productivity and Temporal Distribution

A progressive increase in publications on inclusive education and assistive technologies was identified during the period 2015-2025. Among the most relevant findings:

The 54% of the articles were published between 2020 and 2025, and 46% were published between 2015 and 2019, reflecting a growth in academic interest in the topic, especially given the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education.

Journals with the Highest Impact

The main journals that published research on assistive technologies and inclusive education were: Revista Latinoamericana de Educación Inclusiva, Educación y Educadores, Revista Electrónica de Tecnología Educativa, International Journal of Inclusive Education, and Journal of Assistive Technologies. These publications are characterized by their high impact in the educational and technological fields.

Most Relevant Authors and Affiliations

Recurring authors on the topic were identified, with a notable concentration of researchers from: Mexico (6%); Colombia (8%); Spain (10%); Chile (10%); and Ecuador (25%). The universities with the highest scientific output in this field were: Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona (Spain); Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM); and Pontifical Catholic University of Chile. Twenty-five percent of the articles analyzed were published by Ecuadorian researchers affiliated with Universidad Laica Eloy Alfaro de Manabí in Ecuador, evidence that indicates that country's growing participation in the discussion on inclusive education and technological accessibility. Predominant Thematic Areas

Through keyword and abstract analysis, the most recurrent themes in the scientific output were identified: Use of assistive technologies in inclusive education (55%); Pedagogical and technological barriers for students with visual impairments (30%); Strategies for implementing ICTs in special education (15%). The use of specialized software such as screen readers (JAWS and NVDA), digital Braille materials, and artificial intelligence applications for accessibility were some of the most prominent topics in the publications.

Impact and Citations
40% of the articles analyzed have more than 20 citations in Scopus or Web of Science, indicating their relevance in the scientific community.
The studies with the greatest impact focus on the implementation of accessible digital platforms, the use of artificial intelligence in inclusive education, and the adoption of technological devices for people with visual impairments.

4. Discussion

The bibliometric analysis shows growth in scientific production on inclusive education and assistive technologies, especially in the last five years. The highest-impact journals and the most cited authors come from Ecuador, Spain, Mexico, Chile, and Colombia.

4.1. The advances and challenges of inclusive education

In Latin American nations, educational inclusion and the use of assistive technology have made significant progress, but face similar challenges. Thus, in Mexico and Chile, enrollment rates for students with disabilities have increased, but barriers to access and educational quality persist (Aquino et al., 2015; Valdés et al., 2023). In Ecuador, 78% of children and young people with disabilities attend the education system, albeit with deficiencies in resources and adaptations (Ocampo, 2018). These findings highlight the need to strengthen inclusive policies toward these goals. Among the advances, progressive legislation stands out in each nation. For example, Ecuador's 2008 Constitution guarantees equitable access to education (UNESCO, 2023). Authors such as Basantes et al. (2018), Viscaíno (2018), and Rivas (2024) agree that the use of assistive technologies has improved the inclusion of students with disabilities. However, authors such as Villafuerte and Carreño (2015) and Rodriguez and Garcia (2024) confirm that the challenges include a persistent lack of teacher training in inclusive methodologies and insufficient access to resources for curricular adaptation, creating a gap in the educational context. Furthermore, structural, pedagogical, and attitudinal barriers that hinder the full inclusion of students with visual impairments persist. According to Palmeros and Gairín (2016), the lack of training in attention to diversity limits the effective application of inclusive strategies. Likewise, Victoriano (2017) identifies that discriminatory attitudes within the classroom affect the retention of students with disabilities. It is added that authors such as Anquino et al. (2015), Fajardo (2017), Fernández et al. (2015), Llamazares et al. (2017), maintain that problems persist that urgently need to be overcome. Thus, Aquino et al. (2015) state that barriers to inclusive education are related to accessibility, the development of assistive technology, and limited teacher training. Fernández et al. (2015) argue that the lack of specific strategies for working with students with visual impairments demonstrates a notable gap in educational accessibility, while Fajardo (2017) argues for the urgency of establishing regulations to guarantee access to educational resources and adaptations that favor the inclusion of students with visual impairments. These barriers are compounded by structural problems, such as the shortage of accessible materials and physical adaptations in educational institutions (Monge et al., 2021).

4.2. Care for students with visual impairment

Research by Pérez et al. (2015) and Ibáñez et al. (2017) concurs that visual impairment affects quality of life, requiring adaptation strategies and specialized resources to promote inclusion and autonomy. Meza (2018) asserts that visual impairment can lead to academic failure if appropriate learning strategies are not implemented. Furthermore, visual impairment affects the ability to perceive and process information, making it difficult to perform daily activities (Cruz et al., 2019). Likewise, Cáceres et al. (2019) mention that visual impairment poses educational challenges, affecting students' communication, social interaction, and emotional development. This deficit persists as a prevalent condition in the student population, with significant impacts on learning and social integration (Montoya and López, 2022). The lack of accessible materials and adaptive methodologies continues to be a recurring problem in educational institutions (Huenul et al., 2016). Furthermore, there is evidence of a lack of curricular adaptations for students with this condition, which impacts reading comprehension and participation in academic activities (Coneo, 2019; López and Vásquez, 2022). The socio-emotional development of students with visual impairments is also affected. Research suggests that these students experience higher levels of anxiety and depression due to the lack of effective inclusion strategies (Santa Cruz et al., 2021). Furthermore, teachers require specific training on accessible teaching materials and adaptive methodologies (Lozano et al., 2021), highlighting the need to strengthen teacher training in inclusive education.

4.3. Contribution of Assistive Technologies to the Educational Process of Students with Visual Impairments

Beltrán et al. (2015) argue that the use of assistive technologies, such as screen readers and Braille materials, improves student autonomy. Llamazares et al. (2017) argue that tiflotechnology promotes the autonomy of individuals with visual impairments. Furthermore, Basantes et al. (2018) assert that technological tools enhance students' access to the information required for their studies, which improves their functional capacities. These tools are essential for overcoming barriers in school environments (Esparza et al., 2018), where collaboration between educational institutions, governments, and specialized organizations is key to optimizing their implementation (Mogollón et al., 2019). Núñez and López (2020) argue that assistive technology and adapted methodologies enhance inclusive learning for students with visual impairments. Thus, the use of JAWS and NVDA applications facilitates data reading and improves learning conditions (Zamora and Marín, 2021). At the same time, artificial intelligence, augmented reality, and adaptive platforms improve visual acuity, but their use faces challenges due to a lack of resources and educational policies (Acho et al., 2021; Torres, 2024).

This is a fundamental resource in inclusive education, generating positive impacts on access to information and learning for students with visual impairments (Pérez and Reeves, 2023). Tools such as electronic Braille displays, screen readers, and touchscreens have improved reading comprehension and written production (Viscaíno, 2018; Rivas, 2024; Alonso and Villafuerte, 2020). Their application has enabled the development of more equitable and participatory methodologies (Sánchez et al., 2024). However, other studies question the effectiveness of these strategies, arguing that they have not significantly improved the academic performance of students with visual impairments (Sánchez & Sabando, 2021). Furthermore, access to these tools remains unequal, especially in institutions with financial limitations (García Rivas, 2024), and the training of teaching staff in the use of assistive technology remains a weakness that must be overcome to ensure its effectiveness (Torres, 2024). In the case of Ecuador, García Rivas (2024) indicates that Ecuadorian educators value assistive technology but face challenges related to connectivity, access to devices, and teacher training.

Within the framework of research, the need to design teacher training strategies that integrate adaptive teaching approaches and the use of assistive technologies as support tools for effective inclusion arises. The proposal is to design training programs that incorporate inclusive methodologies in initial teacher training, as well as to establish educational policies that promote universal accessibility in the education system. The consolidation of an inclusive culture in educational institutions must be based on collaboration between teachers, students, families, and administrations, ensuring an equitable and accessible learning environment for all.

5. Conclusion

Based on a systematic review of the specialized literature, the authors declare full compliance with the objective proposed for this study: to contribute to the consolidation of educational innovations for the care of students with visual impairments through a review of scientific publications addressing assistive technology during the period 2015-2025. The data presented reflect the most recent state of scientific production on inclusive education and the use of assistive technologies for students with visual impairments. It is concluded that inclusive education in Latin America has made significant progress in terms of regulations and the implementation of assistive technologies. However, structural, pedagogical, and attitudinal barriers persist that require urgent attention. Teacher training, the provision of accessible resources, and the formulation of effective inclusive policies are key strategies to ensure truly equitable, high-quality education for all students, regardless of their abilities. The research findings highlight the relevance of incorporating assistive technologies in the curricular design of inclusive education, the need to ensure availability for students with visual impairments and have teacher training strategies in the use and application of inclusive digital tools. For future studies, the following lines of research are proposed: (1) incorporation of adapted teaching materials and the use of specialized software for the attention of students with visual impairments, (2) measurement of the impact of curricular adaptations on the academic and socio-emotional performance of students with visual impairments. Based on the above, this research shows a systematic analysis of scientific publications that integrates visual deficit and assistive technology, contributing to the development of inclusive education in Ecuador.

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