Introduction of the gender perspective in the university teaching: a study about inclusive language in Spanish

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Abstract—**Equality and inclusion are part of the strategic plans of the universities. In particular, the Spanish government has established that the universities should have equality units to apply the principle of equality between women and men. These units are in charge of the definition of the Equality Plans. These Plans vary from one university to another, but they are focused on including the gender perspective in the university's different activities. Teachers' specific training about gender mainstreaming should be one of the key actions to foster equality in higher education. This work presents findings on participants of a course about "Introduction of the gender perspective in the University teaching" developed in the University of Salamanca in June 2020. The document describes the organization and structure of the course with a particular focus on the adaptation to online format due to the COVID-19 crisis. Furthermore, we share some of the results about the participants' perceptions and opinions on the inclusion of non-sexist language in Spanish and their educational practices.**

Keywords—gender, strategies, diversity, inclusion, language, training teachers.

I. INTRODUCTION

The University plays a fundamental role in achieving a society where the principles of equality prevail. According to the Guide to Good Practice in Education for Equality in Europe [1], most of the Education for Equality policies focus on eradicating traditional sexist roles and stereotypes. It is based on the idea that the context is not neutral and sexist, and therefore in the educational centers they reproduce themselves. Students and teachers must then be trained in values such as equality, tolerance, dialogue and practical conflict resolution and introduce this knowledge and skills into the educational curriculum.

In the context of the University of Salamanca (Spain), the Equality Unit has carried out during the 2016/2017 academic year the "Analysis of the subjects on gender taught by the USAL and the competencies in matters of gender equality" [2]. This study shows that many of the academic guides for the different grades, the references on gender perspective are reduced to "take into account the fundamental rights and equal opportunities between men and women, the principles of equal opportunity". This guideline is also visible in many academic guides for the different degrees at the University of La Laguna (Spain).

There are various ways of incorporating the gender perspective into university teaching. Some universities develop specifics degrees focused on gender studies, but there are other approaches to work the gender perspective in higher education. For example, there are degrees that have specific subjects of equality. Other approaches follow a transversal gender mainstreaming, in which the contents of equality are integrated into any subject of the curriculum. This activity addresses this cross-cutting approach from university teachers' training, both those who are currently active, and doctoral students whose skills include training to be future teachers.

Although there are guidelines for education in equality and co-education [3-5], there is no high penetration among university teachers in the universities. This is evident in the low number of teaching innovation projects that somehow address the gender perspective. If we look at the figures for the last 10 years at the University of Salamanca, only 1% of the projects developed dealing with the gender perspective in teaching, most of them in the area of law and social sciences [6].

Likewise, among the actions defined in the Equality Plan of the University of Salamanca there is a focus on specific training so that the gender perspective is included in teaching, research and cultural dissemination activities, and the realization of specialized Extraordinary Courses, in as many editions as necessary. This type of action is also within the competence of the Research Institute for Educational Sciences (IUCE), responsible for defining and implementing the annual Teacher Training Plan of the University of Salamanca. The present paper is framed in this context and aims to complement the few training initiatives in education in equality and co-education that are developed in the University through an inter-university and cross-cutting approach.

This work presents the main goals and the structure of the training course and describes the participants' opinions about the use of non-sexist language in University subjects.

The rest of the document is organized as follows. Section 2 describes the training course structure. Section 3 describes the results about the perceptions and opinions of the participants on the inclusion of non-sexist language in Spanish and in their educational practices. Finally, the last section summarizes the main conclusions from this work.

II. TRAINING COURSE ON "INTRODUCTION OF GENDER PERSPECTIVE INTO UNIVERSITY TEACHING"

A. Course design

The training course has been organized at the University of Salamanca since the 2018-2019 academic year. This is the first course that addresses the gender perspective as part of the Institutional Training Plan.

The course's target audience is teachers from the University of Salamanca without any previous knowledge about gender perspectives in education.

The course's duration was 8 hours, and it has been developed in June 2020 through the Virtual Campus of the University of Salamanca (Fig. 1).

The main goals of this training course have been the following:

- Educating for equality in the University.

- Incorporate the gender perspective in the curriculum of a subject.

- Promote the development of innovative teaching projects focused on gender perspective.

- To analyze reflectively the planning and development of university teaching to detect gender biases (teaching guides, bibliographic sources, contents, language and examples used, relationship between POI and students, interaction in the classroom, creation of working groups, reports, etc.).

- Propose strategies to avoid gender bias.

Besides, the main topics of the course are:

1. Introduction to co-education.

2. Gender and equality in the university environment.

3. Good co-educational practices and gender equality in teaching innovation.

4. Strategies to address teaching and learning processes from a gender perspective gender.

5. Case studies of gender mainstreaming in undergraduate and graduate

This course's methodology is based on active and student-centered teaching strategies, with the role of teachers as facilitators. The topics will be presented by the teachers and then discussed with the participants and the resolution of practical exercises. The practical part is focused on working on real teaching guides and the elaboration of co-educational teaching innovation proposals.

Although the course was designed with an on-site approach, it was adapted to online format due to the universities' online transformation during the lockdown because of the COVID-19 pandemic. In particular, the transformation was focused on offering the course as a Small Private Online Course (SPOC) [7] combining educational materials in video, PDF and Genially contents with asynchronous interaction through forums and synchronous sessions at the beginning and the end of the course. Even though in an online approach, the course should have a duration of one week in order to ensure acquiring knowledge through the performance of a series of exercises, it was necessary to maintain the dates of the course as they were approved in the Institutional Training Plan.

The activities of this course have been organized in several parts:

a) Opening videoconference:

- Synchronous activity through a videoconference session available in the Virtual Campus.

- Introduction to co-education and gender perspective.

- Introduction and discussion about inclusive language.

b) Didactic guides:

- Rubric to analyze co-educational practices.

- Activity to apply the rubric and analyze a particular subject. Although the analysis could be applied to the whole subject, it is very difficult to do it in a short time. For this reason, the main analysis was focused on the didactic guide of one of their subjects.

- Forum to support teachers during the analysis and solve doubts and issues.

c) Co-educational practice:

- Complementary materials to go deeper into co-educational practices.

- Model Canvas for the design of co-educational practices and rubrics for their assessment [8].

- Activity to introduce co-education in their own teaching practices through the design of a co-educational practice using the Canvas provided.

d) Inclusion language:

- Discussion forum about inclusive language.

- Survey about inclusive language.

e) Closing videoconference:

- Synchronous activity through a videoconference session available at the Virtual Campus.

- Voluntary presentation of some of the designed co-educational practices.

- Ideas and guidelines for defining teaching innovation practices which works in the inclusion of gender perspective in the teaching-learning processes and also in the different activities developed in the university.

The course included a set of multimedia videos and presentations on each of the topics and other educational resources. Besides, there are exercises, surveys and discussion forums to support interaction and to solve doubts and issues during the implementation of the exercises.

Fig. 1. Course in the virtual campus of the University of Salamanca.

B. Participants

A total of 25 teachers and future teachers were accepted into the course (the maximum number of participants offered). Specifically, 5 men (20%) and 20 women (80%). All the participants passed the course.

There were different profiles and teachers from different fields of knowledge. Regarding the profile: 8 Research Staff in Training (32%), 5 Adjunct Professor (20%), 3 Assistant Professor (*Profesor Ayudante Doctor* in Spain) (12%), 1 Collaborator teacher (*Profesor Colaborador* in Spain) (4%), 2 Contract Professor (*Profesor Contratado Doctor* in Spain) (8%), 6 Associate Professor (*Profesor Titular* in Spain) (24%).

Regarding the field of knowledge, 8 participants from Education (32%), 7 from Philology, Linguistics and Literature (28%), 1 from Psychology (4%), 2 from Chemistry (8%), 3 from Biology (12%), 1 from Engineering (4%), 3 from Social Science (12%).

III. THE USE OF NON-SEXIST LANGUAGE IN THE COURSES

Regarding the use of non-sexist language, we have collected feedback using two different approaches. First, a discussion forum in which we asked participants about their opinions about inclusive language. Second, an anonymous survey based on a survey developed by the Universidad Nacional de Río Negro (Argentina).

The participants were the same teachers in both instruments, the forum and the survey.

A. The discussion

In the discussion forum about inclusive language, teachers were asked about their own opinion on inclusive language, if they think it is necessary or a fad that will disappear in a few years, and the impact they think it can have on their teaching. This discussion aims to find out the different opinions and get the different points of view that exist among a heterogeneous group of teachers.

The qualitative analysis of the content has been carried out using the posts in the forum. Some of their opinions about inclusive language can be summarized and noted by the following words:

- Cumbersome.
- Visibility.
- Evolution.
- Mentality.
- Resistance.
- Norms.
- Fashion.
- Tolerance.
- Risk of exclusion.
- Biases.
- Advancement.
- Transformation.
- Provocative attitude.
- Identify themselves.
- Learning.

B. The survey

Regarding the survey about non-sexist language, the instrument was composed of a set of demographic questions:

- Age range (21-30, 31-40, 41-50, 51-60, more than 60).
- Gender (woman, man, none of the previous options, I prefer not to answer).
- Do you consider that you belong to the LGBTIQ community? (Yes, no).

On the other hand, a set of quantitative questions:

- Do you agree with the use of gender-differentiating marks in everyday speech?
- Do you use these marks in your everyday speech?

- Which mark do you think is more suitable? (@, X, E, replicate masculine and feminine)
- Where and in which situations do you use these marks?

Finally, two open questions:

- What do you think is the reason for the emergence of inclusive language and for what purpose?
- Do you find it an interesting topic to talk about, important, ridiculous, or just do not care? Why?

Noteworthy that Spanish has a binary system, masculine and feminine, and the masculine option is used as a generic to refer to a group regardless of its gender composition [9]. For this reason, different options have emerged to include all genders. In particular, the semiotic sign "@", the linguistic sign "x" and the -*e* morpheme are options to replace the -*o* and -*a* morphemes. For example, instead write "todos y todas", using "todxs" or "tod@s" or "todes".

Our participants were 25 and 17 people answered the survey. The 76,5% were female and the 23,5% male. The 29,4% were between 21-30 years old, the 23,5% between 31-40 years, 23,5% between 41-50 years, and the last 23,5% between 51-60 years.

As results we obtained the 88,2% do not consider that belong to the LGBTIQ community. The 70,6% are agree with the use of gender-differentiating marks (symbols X, @) (Fig. 2). The 64,7% use these marks in their everyday speech. Besides, the 50% think that in Spanish it is good to replicate the use of terms for both genders. The 57,1% use these marks in writing but only the 35,7% in speaking.
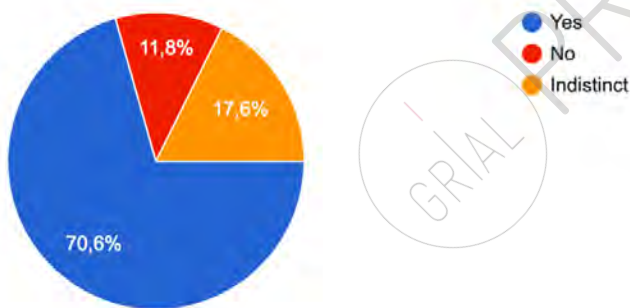

Fig. 2. Using the different options to include both genders.

They said that it is easier to find these marks in social networks (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) (47,1%) than in traditional media (11,8%).

When we asked about the reason for the emergence of inclusive language and what purpose, they answered the following:

- "To a deconstructive questioning. The fact that the masculine has always been used to generalize does not mean it is correct. It is time to rethink things".
- "Make the invisible visible (women, of course, but more groups marginalized by society)".
- "Fight the sexism".
- "To give visibility to women in society".

- "The purpose of inclusive language is very clear, and that is that the language is from and for everyone. History has been written by and for men, leaving women in the shadows for centuries. In society there are men, there are women, there are people ... and it is necessary that anyone can feel part of the language."
- "As for the emergence, I think people are becoming aware of what I have just said, hence the importance taken of inclusive language".
- "People are more aware that they are not always represented in the pronouns and genders normally used, almost always male. The aim is to give more visibility to women or people who feel identified with neutral genders".
- "As one more path in the search for equality".
- "To the need to highlight the discrimination and invisibility of people of a gender other than the male. It is a matter of language that reflects this reality while promoting permanent legislative and mentality changes. It is a sum of vindictive, educational, legislative and psychosocial purposes".
- "To the feminist movement".
- "As a way for all people to feel identified and respected in order to eliminate discrimination and rejection by those who do not accept diversity, its richness and value. It arises as a way for the voices of all people without exception to be heard".
- "It is a wake-up call to give visibility to a situation of discrimination".
- "In order to give visibility to 51% of the population".
- "In order to highlight the diversity and its mental representations in the social imaginary".
- "I think it's a way to raise awareness about gender inequalities and help solve the problem".
- "Defense of human rights and equity".

Finally, the 88,2% considered important or very important to incorporate the inclusive and non-sexist language into the University teaching.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

In this paper we have presented the design of an instructional course designed for teachers. The main goal of this course was the introduction of co-educational practices and gender perspective into the university teaching. Also, we have included an activity about the inclusive and non-sexist language. We have discussed with the participants through a forum this topic and also, we have evaluated their opinions using a survey. The results showed that the participants think that inclusive and non-sexist language are one of the key issues for giving visibility to women, equity, diversity and a more inclusive society. Thus, we conclude that this topic should be promoted from the Universities. Also, the creation of training courses for the transformation of contents, educational guides and resources for a more inclusive teaching.

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