

The Educational Intervention Undertaken as Regards Students with Communication Difficulties Enrolled in Pervasive Development Disorder (PDD) Classrooms, In Bilingual and Preferential Attention Schools in the Community of Madrid (Spain)

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Abstract

In mainstream primary education schools of the Community of Madrid, this intervention is being undertaken in the so-called PDD (Pervasive Development Disorder) classrooms. The objective of these classrooms is to attain the inclusion of students in classrooms currently called ASD (Autistic Spectrum Disorder). The purpose of the research is to analyse the treatment which is being undertaken as regards communication difficulties in these schools. In order to research this matter a mixed methodology has been used. It has been determined that PDD classrooms in preferential attention centres favour overcoming communication difficulties for students with special needs, achieving established objectives in the majority of cases throughout Primary Education. In bilingual preferential attention centres, achievement of established objectives for this type of student is lower. Research concludes that the introduction of bilingual programs in preferential attention centres with PDD classrooms involves additional difficulties in the development of the student with communication problems.

Keywords: Bilingualism, PDD Classrooms, Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Communication.

1. Introduction

In recent decades, special education has undergone profound changes, allowing it to advance from segregationist positions to inclusive education proposals framed in the field of general education (Sola, López and Cáceres, 2009; Palomares and Serrano, 2013; González, 2014). Gento and González (2010) consider these facts to determine a real change in attention to students with special education needs: “since the nineties, a great impetus to promote inclusion and full integration has been happening” (p. 46) In this sense, authors like Sánchez and Torres (2002), maintain that the current educational systems must take on new postulates: the starting point is the differentiating factor for the human being; establish respect for diversity as a valuable and progressive asset, with reference to the different modes and rates of learning; the need for a new curriculum that adapts to these differences (open, flexible and dynamic); etc.

Recent educational laws enacted in our country have not been unaffected by these changes and new perspectives. For example, Organic Law 1/1990, of 3 October, of General Organisation of the Educational System (LOGSE) establishes that “the education system shall provide the necessary resources for students with special educational needs, whether temporary or permanent, so that they may achieve within this same system, the general objectives established for all students.” In a similar vein, the Organic Law 10/2002, of 23 December, of Quality of Education (LOCE) makes reference to the principles of inclusion and standardisation as a means to ensure non-discrimination and effective equality to all students in accessing and remaining within the education system.

Accordingly, the Organic Law 2/2006, of 3 May, of Education (LOE) notes that the education of students shall be made on the basis of their own characteristics, integrating them into ordinary groups or specialised classrooms for those who attend mainstream schools. More recently, the Organic Law 8/2013, of 9 December, of Improvement of Quality Education (LOMCE) continues -in its theoretical framework- a similar venture. In line with state legislation and towards a focus on diversity framed within the current theoretical models of a new conception of inclusive education (Escribano and Martínez, 2013), during the 2001/2002 academic year, an experimental project of preferential integration for students with special educational needs (SEN) associated with Pervasive Development Disorders (PDD) began in the Community of Madrid. Shortly thereafter, based on this experimental approach, the Community of Madrid launched preferential education centres, with PDD classrooms (Resolution 03/12/2002 of the General Directorate of Teaching Centres authorising the experience of preferential schooling for students with special educational needs associated with Severe Communication and Social Disruptions).

It is necessary to note that the term PDD refers to generalized disturbances in various area of a person's development, mainly within three specific dimensions: social interaction, communication and the presence of stereotyped interests and activities; this includes autism, Rett's syndrome, childhood disintegrative disorder, Asperger syndrome and other pervasive developmental disorders, not otherwise specified (DSM-IV-TR, 2002). CIE-10 (1992) define PDD as a group of disorders characterized by qualitative disruptions characteristic of reciprocal social interactions and modes of communication, as well as a repertoire of restricted, stereotyped and repetitive activities and interests, encompassing childhood autism, atypical autism, Rett's syndrome, childhood disintegrative disorder, Asperger syndrome, pervasive developmental disorder, not otherwise specified and other pervasive developmental disorders. It is true that, at present, the term PDD is included within Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) as a new category that shares common symptoms and, to some extent, differentials in relation to other PDDs (DSM-V), and whose affectation is preferable to characterize within a continuum (Mulas et al, 2010), which includes autistic subjects, As perger and PDD with no specific cause.

Regardless of the definition and classification used for schooling, the Community of Madrid has opted for the PDD classrooms in ordinary schools with preferential attention. Students enrolled in these classrooms present special educational needs associated with pervasive developmental disorder, in which the triad of restricted interests, a communication disorder and difficulty in social skills is present. With this type of schooling, students with SEN are in an ordinary school with an age appropriate peer group. This school has a support classroom - PDD classroom- with faculty support, education technicians and specific training material, dividing the school day for these students between the regular and support classrooms. PDD classrooms are support environments that allow for the development of an adapted curriculum, principally in the social, communication and language areas, individualised attention, intensive and specialised support, standardised learning, social integration and organisation context, structure, and adaptation to the school setting.

Moreover, the Community of Madrid has also currently immersed itself in the development of bilingual programs, launching in 2010 (Order 5958/2010, of 7 December, of the Ministry of Education, regulating bilingual schools in the Community of Madrid). These programs develop a teaching model in which the student not only learns English, but also receives partial instruction in the English language. In this way, the English language becomes a second vehicular language of teaching. Recent research points to several advantages in the development of a student body enrolled within a bilingual context (Belinchón, 2010; Costa, 2004). However, it appears that the introduction of bilingual programs in preferential attention centres with PDD classrooms may lead to a number of additional difficulties, especially in the communicative sphere of students enrolled in these classrooms.

In this regard, the meeting in Murcia (Spain) on Bilingualism and Attention to Diversity (2013) identified important information concerning binomial bilingualism/ASD students; intervention in the acquisition of a second language should help students achieve a potential level of development considering contextual capabilities and demands; it is not recommended teaching a second language to those in the ASD who are not verbal, intervention should be based on the transference and learning of the mother tongue; in the case of introducing a second language, this should be performed gradually, by selecting content based on the same functionality. Therefore it is safe to say that, in monolingual contexts, intervention and treatment for communication difficulties in students enrolled in PDD classrooms are clearly defined. However, in bilingual contexts, as is our case, the situation changes considerably. It is also true that there is no research that exclusively analyses the communication difficulties in bilingual contexts, and we consider it pertinent to address this carefully and rigorously.

2. Method

Based on the aforementioned and after several years of development of bilingual programs in the Community of Madrid (Spain), we are presenting research that aims to understand the attention to communication difficulties for students enrolled in PDD classrooms within bilingual schools, from the point of view of the teachers who are working in these schools and specific classrooms. In this research, predominantly descriptive, a mixed methodology has been used that integrates search and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data, constituting, according to Erickman & Roth two phases of a single process through which information can be obtained relevant to the case in question. Information has been collected through interviews and questionnaires. After analysing various documentary sources, a specific questionnaire for this topic has been designed, duly validated and with sufficient reliability (Crombach Alpha Coefficient of 0.981), with a Likert scale (1 to 4), in which several questions are raised relative to the general operation of PDD classrooms, benefits that these have in the integration and care of students with communication difficulties and their effectiveness in bilingual projects. The semi-structured interview has been made with reference to the above-mentioned questionnaire. Both instruments have allowed for the collection of information on the perception Primary Education teachers have regarding the attention to communication difficulties for students in PDD classrooms in bilingual schools.

Research has been conducted during the 2014-15 academic year in Primary Education Bilingual Public Education Centres within the Community of Madrid. There are currently thirty-three bilingual schools with PDD classrooms; ten interviews have been carried out and two hundred and three questionnaires collected, therefore this sample can be considered sufficiently representative.

3. Results

After the collection, analysis and interpretation of the data obtained through the application of questionnaires (Figure 1), it can be determined that the Primary Education teacher respondents who work in the public bilingual schools with PDD classrooms in the Community of Madrid, largely consider t these classrooms to be the most effective means in achieving integration of a student with communication difficulties (Always: 40%; =3.12), although a large portion of the teaching body senses that these students fail to fully integrate into their peer group throughout this stage of Primary Education (Sometimes: 62%; =2.37). In any case, there is a broad consensus on the issue of good work being done in the PDD classrooms relating to emotional competence as a means of student integration (Always: 81%; =3.43). According to the data obtained, the faculty respondents do not consider bilingualism to favour the integration of students with communication difficulties (Never: 43%; =1.75). However, it is also true that more than half of the respondents indicated that these bilingual programs allow for the student enrolled in the PDD classroom to gain confidence and the ability to learn to communicate in English (Almost always: 41%; =2.90); in line with this, a large part of the teacher respondents considered that, in general terms, students with educational needs enrolled in these classrooms demonstrated a real desire to learn the English language (Almost always: 29%;X =2.90).

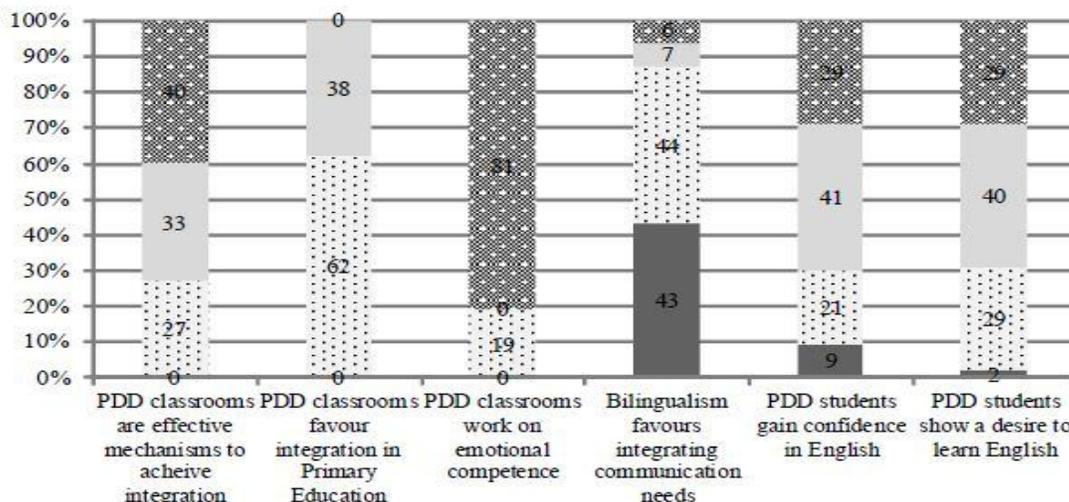


Figure 1: Respondent opinions.

A comparative analysis of the different response rates based on the building blocks of the questionnaire was made (Figure 2), which affirms that teachers consider PDD classrooms to be an effective tool to cater to students with educational needs and, even though a significantly less percentage, respondents believe that these classrooms contribute to the care and integration of students with communication difficulties. On the contrary, it appears that the teaching body believes that bilingualism poses an additional difficulty to the effective academic development of students with communication difficulties enrolled in PDD classrooms in bilingual schools.

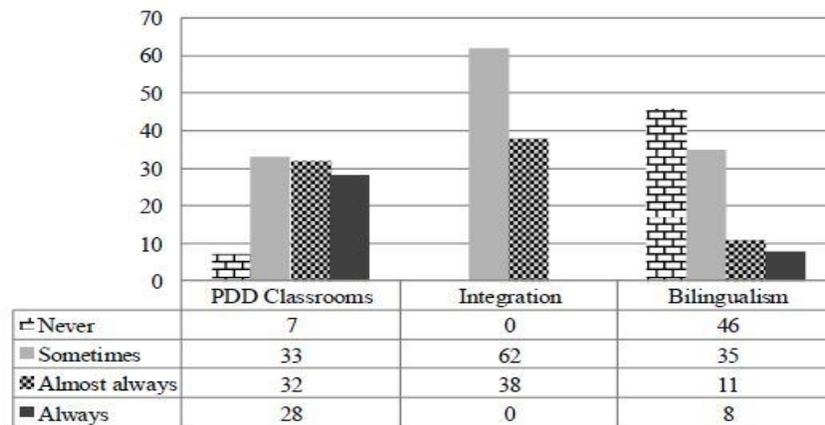


Figure 2. Results comparison.

Therefore, with respect to the data obtained through the interviews conducted, it is safe to say that most of the teachers interviewed very positively value the operation of the PDD classrooms, viewing them as a very effective method of attending to students with communication difficulties within preferential attention centres. In any case, what respondents found to be the most difficult was the inclusion of students who have communication difficulties, making reference to this type of disability, grade of impact thereof, associated disabilities, skills and strategies to follow, the learning rate and time dedicated to each one of these students. Likewise, the expansion of personal and material resources within the classroom is suggested. The methodology should be based on concrete possibilities for each student, developing various intelligences through an open curriculum. The need to work on strategies based on attention and sociability in the PDD classrooms is raised, reducing the number of students per group and increasing English sessions, including conversation classes for all of those students with difficulties. Moreover, respondents stressed that these classrooms neither work nor function in isolation, but are connected with the rest of the school. Finally, reference is made to training and the need to exchange experiences and learning models relating to this subject with other centres and schools.

4. Conclusions

After analysing the data presented above, we can determine that teachers positively value PDD classrooms, considering that a large part of the students with communication difficulties achieve the majority of objectives proposed throughout the Primary Education stage. However, positive perception by the teachers lowers when binomial PDD classrooms-Bilingual Centres are included. According to the collected data, it appears that the perception of the faculty regarding the percentage of success of this type of student is lower in bilingual contexts. Based on the foregoing, it can be determined that PDD classrooms in preferential attention centres favour overcoming communication difficulties for students with needs, achieving, on the most part, the objectives throughout Primary Education. By contrast, in the preferential attention centres that are bilingual, it seems that goal achievement for this type of student is lower. All of this relates to what has already been expressed by Korkman et al., in the sense that bilingualism does not accelerate language development in students nor does it contribute to overcoming possible communication difficulties at a faster rate. Therefore, it is necessary to move forward in this subject matter, thoroughly investigating different techniques, strategies, methodologies and specific and precise patterns that allow for the improvement of performance and exceedance of communication difficulties of students with educational needs enrolled in bilingual schools, without also forgetting the importance and necessity of teacher training in this field, as a cornerstone in the improvement of quality in the educational response to diversity (Domingo et al.).

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