PERCEPTION OF TEACHERS AND LEARNING NEEDS IN SPECIFIC SPECIAL EDUCATION CENTERS.

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ABSTRACT:

This paper presents a research which has been carried out at the University of Jaén. It was directed to know learning-needs which teachers should have to teach in Special Education schools in the province of Jaén. For this purpose was chosen a descriptive research. A question-paper (developed for this purpose) was the main data collection instrument.

This paper will only be focused in part of this research. It will consist of educational services descriptions that were received by students with severe and permanent disabilities in these special education schools. Due to this reason, after a brief introduction which will establish a theoretical framework (used to build the research problem), study’s objectives will be mentioned as well as working hypotheses. Subsequently, used methodology has been detailed. Finally are described data analysis processes, preparation results and final conclusions.

KEY WORDS: teacher education, special schools for special education, attention to diversity, educational support needs, disability.

1. INTRODUCTION

Recognition of differences is a basic principle in current educational system which is effective through personal attention to students’ educational needs, in order to ensure opportunity equality that will allow complete students social integration.
In Spanish Organic Act 2/2006, of May 3rd, on education, needs are defined as "that people who needs, through full school enrollment or only for a period, special support and special educational attention due to their disabilities or serious behavior disorders” (L.O.E., Spanish Organic Act, Art. 73). Moreover, educational needs are presented in this law as fundamental quality principles of education for every student, regardless of any particular condition and equity which should ensure equal opportunities, educative inclusion and non-discrimination; and to act as a compensator, cultural, economic and social development element.

Article 3.2 of Royal Decree 696/1995, 28th April, about educational organization of pupils with special needs, establishes that "pupils with temporary or permanent special educational needs associated to his/her school background, as well as to his/her personal giftedness and psychical, motor or sensorial disabilities conditions, will be enrolled in normal centers and programs. Only when those needs could not be properly satisfied (in a reasonable way) in normal centers, will be proposed his/her schooling in special education centers”.

Students enrolled in these centers have learning difficulties in different situations and these would be hardly resolved in normal schools. According to this, a diversified curriculum is needed to develop complete potential and possibilities of the students.

Lessons in special education institutions include a basic learning period (mandatory) and a transition to an adult and working life:

The basic learning period begins when pupils are six years old and can reach until they are eighteen. Exceptionally, and as a suggestion of Orientation Educational Equipment, pupils who are in Secondary Child school can also be enrolled. At this stage the Educational and Curricular Project takes as model the capacities which are
established in the purposes of all areas in primary education curriculum. Also may be joined capacities of other stages according to pupils’ needs.

According to Article 31 of the Decree 147/2002, 14th May which establishes pupil’s educational organization, these special needs will be associated to his/her personal capacities. The curriculum adjustment for the Basic and Obligatory Learning period tries to develop capacities of communication, social integration and acquisition of labor skills. In this way try to improve the quality of life and get a higher functionality and personal autonomy grade in daily life activities, increasing student welfare. For this stage, the curriculum is organized according to three areas of experience and development: corporal knowledge and identity construction; physical and social media knowledge and participation; and communication and language.

Complementary formation for Adult Life Transition is channeled to facilitate personal autonomy and develop social integration of pupils. In this period pupils can take specific Initial Programs for Professional Qualification when they have educational needs, or programs for Transition to Adult and Labor Life Formation.

The maximum duration of the commentary formation would be four years. It could begin when pupils are sixteen and would be extended up to twenty years. During this time, the curriculum is organized according to experience areas which tend to develop the personal autonomy capacities in daily life, social and community integration; and orientation and labor formation.

2. **INVESTIGATION AIMS AND HYPOTHESIS**

This study tries to know (through study and research) the perceptions and formative needs which the teaching staff have in Special Education Specific Centers in province of Jaen. These teachers must offer a quality educational response to students who, due to their serious and permanent disability, cannot be enrolled in an ordinary educational center.
More precisely, will be emphasized the next specific aims:

- Analyzing the educational practice adequacy according to scholar staff age, qualifications, center seniority, …
- Knowing the educational attention which is received by pupils with disability in these centers.
- Examining the teacher professional development according to received formation (initial and permanent).
- Detecting the teachers’ most relevant formative needs from the organizational, didactic and curricular area of Special Education.
- Establishing improving offers in formation of the above mentioned education professionals.

Our departure point will be this work-hypothesis: Describing the formative needs which have teachers of Special Education Centers (of the province of Jaen) concerning to pupils with educational needs attention who are enrolled in school is possible.

3. METHODOLOGICAL DESIGN

After analyzing and when, through specialized literature, has been confirmed (Colás and Buendía, 1992; Fox, 1981; Bisquerra, 1996), a descriptive investigation was chosen and through it will be tried "to describe systematically a particular population or an interesting area and characteristics in an objective and demonstrable way" (Colás, 1992:177).

From the descriptive methodology surveys were selected as main technology which is orientated to description of given situations (Dalen and Meyer, 1980; Bartolomé, 1984). For this purpose questionnaires were used like data collection instruments. These
questionnaires were designed for this aim and directed to teachers of the Special Education Specific Centers in the province of Jaén.

For the above instrument was chosen a Likert scale. This scale is defined as "the one that is formed by a set of question related to attitudes, every them with an equal value" (Bisquerra, 1996: 110). Answers range will be between 1 and 4 points. In this case, 1 would be "Completely agree" and 4 "Totally disagree".

When the opportune instrumental steps of construction were taken (Fox, 1981; Ary, Jacobs and Razavieh, 1982; Buendía, 1996), was generated a first version of the questionnaire. They consist in three clearly differentiated dimensions as appears in next table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions</th>
<th>Pupil’s educational attention</th>
<th>Teacher’s professional development</th>
<th>Curriculum and diversity attention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General questions about attention to diversity and pupils’ educational needs</td>
<td>Teachers’s formation adaptation (initial and permanent)</td>
<td>Item 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42 y 43.</td>
<td>Item 44, 45, 46, 47 y 48.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Questionnaire dimension (Source: own production)

Moreover, in questionnaire 1 two paragraphs have been added. The first one is referred to teachers’ demographic information; the second was filled, exclusively, by centres’ directors. Through both paragraphs was tried to get information about the centre.

When this instrument has been elaborated the next step will be to verify the reliability and validity of the same one in order to determine if the evaluation and data collection have enough credibility and operability signs (Albert, 2006:101).
In this way was understood that the questionnaire would be valid “if it really measures which is said that it measures” (Bisquerra, 1996:91). In this case, has been used validity of content which is based on experts’ opinion and in application of a pilot test.

In the first case were requested several teachers who are specialist in Didactics and Special Education fields from different Andalusian universities. They analysed the questionnaire and delivered their corrections. When objections were incorporated to the questionnaire (mainly they were about grammatical matters, drafting, elimination of some articles, new subject matter incorporation…), application of the pilot test was arranged.

Because of this, the questionnaires were applied to several teachers from a specific Special Education centre from the province of Jaen with the same purposes than the experts’ judge. When the above mentioned objections were incorporated, the questionnaire were finished and sent to different Special Education centres from our province.

Reliability is referred to “degree of consistency in the instrument of measure” (Bisquerra, 1996:92). This reliability degree is expressed by a coefficient which is obtained by different methods. In this case has been used “Alpha de Cronbach”, and was obtained a coefficient: 0.945. In addition, the coefficient is between 0.874 and 0.989 for the three dimensions, and in the articles between 0.942 and 0.947. It would allow ensuring that every dimension really measures which they should measure.

Furthermore, to ensure the reliability instrument, will be applied the “two halves” method and was gotten 0.901 in the first subscale of Alpha value and 0.938 in the second. In addition, the Spearman-Brown reliability coefficient is high enough, 0.723.
3.1. SAMPLE

This research will study the teaching staff of Special Education Centres in the province of Jaén. In this region there are three specific Special Education Centres. One of them has a public character and the two others have a private coordination.

This sample, which is used to establish the study’s conclusions, meets to an accidental or causal non-probabilistic sampling. It is made by teachers who agreed to take part in this investigation answering to the sent questionnaires. To “catch” so many teachers as possible was decided to go personally to the centres to deliver questionnaires (which teachers should complete). Before, the centre’s headmasters were called to forward them the request. Several weeks later, we returned to centres to pick up the filled questionnaires; in total 21 teachers agreed to take part of this study.

Summarizing, teachers’ characteristics which have dominated in this study are detailed below:

- 76% of all the polled teachers were women.
- Teachers’ age ranges were mainly, between 41 and 45 years (28.6%).
- Teacher's qualification was mainly Therapeutic Pedagogy (71.4%). Far below of this number, were teachers who had a Master in Psychopedagogy (14.3%) or Degree in Teaching specialized in Hearing and Language (14.3%).
- Majority of teachers (23.8%) had experience in Special Education Centres between 8 and 14 years.
- A high teachers’ percentage (28.6%) had been working in the centre which they are nowadays between 8 and 14 years.
- 23.8% of polled teachers had experience in ordinary centres, between 8 and 14 years.
95.2% of polled teachers were course tutors, responsible of a group of pupils.

Most of the teachers in our sample do not occupy any position (76.2%).

A high percentage of teachers who were polled (57.1%) had developed some type of practical formation which was related to processes of attention to diversity during his initial formation. Mainly, this kind of formation has been developed in ordinary teaching institutions (19%).

Related to teachers’ permanent training, 47.6% of them assert that they have made some permanent training activity during last three years with duration between 100 and 300 hours.

4. EDUCATIONAL ATTENTION TO PUPILS WITH DISSABILITY IN SPECIAL EDUCATION SPECIFIC CENTRES: RESULTS

To analyse the information was used the SPSS package (Statistical Product and Service Solutions) version 15. Through it a grid, which was used to apply a descriptive analysis, was made when the information was obtained and the purposes confirmed.

The descriptive methods expect, as says their name, the description of the phenomena that are investigated (Bisquerra, 1996:123), in other words, try to know the teacher’s formative needs in specific Special Education Centres, to offer educational attention to pupils with disability.

From this analysis has been extracted the following results:

- Item 12: Attention to the diversity is considered one of the basic props on education must be based

Most of the teachers (76.2%) agree with this affirmation. It means the centre’s duty to attend to all the school pupils who are enrolled, regardless of their
characteristics. On the other hand, five from twenty-one polled teachers disagree with this affirmation (23.8%).

Graph 1. Attention to diversity is considered one of the basic props on which education must be based

- Item 13. Attention to pupils who are enrolled in Special Education centres’ school is based on principals of normalization and incorporation.

Data which are obtained in this item are intimately related with the previous comment: teachers, who considered a basic education prop attention to diversity, also agree with the above mentioned: attention is based on the principle of normalization and incorporation (76 %). Nevertheless is also significant that 33.3 % of teachers disagree with this offer.
Graph 2. Attention to pupils who are enrolled in Special Education centre are based on principles of normalization and incorporation.

- Item 14. Areas where pupils present support for educational specific needs are prioritized.

As was verified, polled teachers think that pupils present the next specific needs, according to order of priority: communicative area and autonomy and personal identity area (67 %), social area (52.4 %), behavioural area (47.6 %), health area (42.9 %) and cognitive area (28.6 %).
Item 15. Specialization of the Special Education centres is advisable according to pupils’ characteristics and/or disabilities.

61.9% of teachers who were involved in our investigation think that Special Education centres should be specialized according to the kind of pupils’ disability. Nevertheless, 38.1% agree with this type of centres which attend to pupils with different kinds of deficits.
Graph 4.1 Specialization of the Special Education centres according to pupils’ characteristics and/or disabilities would be advisable.

- **Item 16. Education of pupils in Special Education Centres contributes to the improvement of pupils’ quality of life, as well as a major degree of personal autonomy and functionality achieves in the daily life activities.**

Educational approach established in Special Education Centres tries to guarantee the capacities development in pupils with serious disabilities. It would allow them to participate in different environments in the most autonomous way and would promote the maximum degree of quality of life and welfare. 71.4 % of the polled professorship is agreed with this statement. However 28.6 % of them are disagreed or completely disagreed with this affirmation.
Graph 5. Education of pupils in Special Education Centres contributes to the improvement of pupils’ quality of life, as well as a major degree of personal autonomy and functionality achieves in the daily life activities.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The main conclusion in this research can be stated that the professorship in Special Education Centres of the province of Jaen is agreed with the statement that attention to pupils who are enrolled in this type of centres should be based on principles of normalization and incorporation.

In this way, they believe in this type of institutions’ specialization according to characteristics and / or disabilities of the attended student. Through this specialization, they think that it would contribute to the improvement of pupils’ quality of life as well as achieve a higher degree of personal autonomy and functionality in the daily life activities.

They think, in addition, that cognitive area is where pupils have higher educational needs, followed by health area.
To conclude this article, will be emphasized the definition of Special Education centre exposed by Cabrerizo and Rubio (2007:255) who considers that “they are institutions more modern every day, more current, more enriching and more demanding of qualified professionals”.

6. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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