

Special Education in Spain

Laura Consuegra Aragón

(/Faculty of Education Science, University of Seville Lauconara@alum.us.es/Spain)

Abstract: The term Special education has gone through many changes. This paper explains the different models for what has been happening, such as the segregationist model, rehabilitative or specialised care model. Inclusive or social model and inclusive model. In addition, the current problems to be solved are also explained.

Key Word: Education, Special education, Spain, Models, Problems.

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I. Introduction

Throughout the history of the human being we have managed to advance in many aspects that surround us in our daily lives, one of them is special education. In this paper we will focus on defining what special education is, describe the different stages it has gone through in Spain and finally we will mention the possible existing problems, which still remain to be solved.

Special education, also known as special education, is the body of knowledge and intervention actions in the psychological, social, pedagogical and medical fields for people with disabilities.

All these interventions are carried out with one objective in mind; to train the disabled individual in such a way that he/she can develop with as little help as possible or even, if possible, independently in certain areas of his/her life, such as work, social, etc.

Moreover, one of its defining characteristics is that it is free of charge in terms of teaching and complementary costs, such as the care, treatment and adaptations that each individual needs, educational and psycho-pedagogical guidance, leisure and free time activities to be carried out, which help their social integration, etc.

Article 49 of the Spanish Constitution states that "the public authorities shall implement a policy of prevention, treatment, rehabilitation and integration of the physically, sensorial and mentally handicapped, to whom they shall provide the specialised care they require". (Spanish Constitution. State official newsletter, 29 December 1978, section 2, chapter 3, pp. 18 to 19).

Under IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) all public schools are required to provide children between the ages of 3 and 21 with certain special education services.

II. Theoretical part based on the bibliography

In relation to the data, a study reveals that 1 in 4 families in the world contains at least one member with certain deficiencies. However, despite this high figure, even in the 21st century, there is still some unattainable scientific knowledge, resulting in the death of 35 million children each year and another 35 million children in the world acquiring a certain deficiency.

This makes us realise that investing in special education is everyone's problem.

Some authors understand inclusive education as 'an emerging educational philosophy and practice that aims to improve access to quality learning in mainstream classrooms for all students through inclusive learning contexts developed within the framework of the common curriculum' (Arnáiz, 1997; Barton, 2000 and Booth and Boinscow, 1998). (Arnaiz, 1997; Barton, 2000 and Booth and Ainscow, 1998).

III. Analysis and development of the chosen topic

To begin with, I would like to find out a little more about the target population of special education and its characteristics.

It is considered appropriate for a child to receive special education if his or her learning is interfered with because of a physical, behavioural, emotional or cognitive problem.

The WHO (World Health Organisation) establishes a classification in which 'impairment', 'disability' and 'handicap' are distinguished, also known as ICIDH.

An impairment is a physical, sensory or mental deficiency. It may be temporary or permanent. It may have been acquired at birth or throughout life. However, a disability prevents people from carrying out any daily activity without having to make a minimum effort. In contrast to a handicap, the person who suffers from a disability suffers from the absence of certain daily activities.

Disability entails the restriction or even the absence of being able to carry out a daily activity, entailing certain alterations in the life of the person who suffers from it.

With regard to the handicap, it is the consequence of the two explained above and entails certain problems when interacting with the environment.

In conclusion, the impairment affects the level of the organs, leading to a disability. It affects at a personal level and therefore ends up leading to a handicap when it comes to establishing contact with society.

Historical overview of special education and educational models developed within special education

We could go back to the Middle Ages in which people with physical (crippled), mental (alienated) and sensory (especially blind) disabilities were treated as madmen or criminals, representing, it can be considered, an advance with respect to previous times when they were eliminated (Castaño, 2009: 405-406).

Thus, in Classical Antiquity and the Middle Ages, the social response to these handicapped people went as far as the physical elimination of newborn babies in certain cultures, as their nature was thought to be totally demonic. Other cultures, on the other hand, isolated these people in asylums and shelters.

In relation to the moment of appearance, there are different opinions depending on the author. Its existence is foreseen around the 16th century, when the first educational practices with children with disabilities were carried out. These practices were carried out thanks to the efforts invested in people like Pedro Ponce de León, a Benedictine monk of Spanish origin who created the first communication system for deaf-mutes after several practices with a small group of deaf people.

Juan de Pablo Bonet, a Spanish speech therapist and pedagogue, helped Pedro Ponce de León with this system as he was in charge of the education of a young nobleman who was deaf from birth. For this reason he cooperated with Pedro Ponce de León to create a language for speakers, deaf and deaf-mute.

However, other authors believe that special education arrived around the 20th century, at which time it was considered a branch of pedagogy.

In 1948 the following wording was recorded in the Declaration of Human Rights in Article 26.1:

Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least as regards elementary and fundamental instruction. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and vocational education shall be made generally available; access to higher education shall be equal for all on the basis of merit' (UN, 1948).

In this declaration, it is clear that education is a right that all human beings have, without excluding anyone. The following are the different educational models through which special education has evolved over the centuries.

Model segregationist

Thanks to certain scientific advances, society began to become aware of the need to help these people. As a result, institutions began to be set up on the outskirts of the cities in which psychiatric doctors were responsible for observing the deficiencies of each individual and trying to resolve them, being treated as if they were an illness.

Jean Marc Gaspard Itard, a French doctor universally known as the founder of otorhinolaryngology, was prominent at this educational stage. He was very interested in the education and teaching of deaf and dumb children. He is considered one of the pioneers in creating the first specialised centres for the blind, the deaf and other disabilities.

Rehabilitative or specialised care model

This educational model is known to have existed around the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. The First World War and the creation of the first laws related to social security gave way to the creation of this model. A new way of understanding functional diversity emerged as it began to be seen as an illness that needed treatment and not as divine punishments, as it was seen in the previous stage. In this way, society in general no longer attributed to itself the causes or reasons for this disability to religion, but rather blamed science.

The objective of the doctors was to cure the person with functional diversity and in case of not being able to do so, their behaviour was modified with the aim of knowing how to function autonomously in society. In this way, certain public policies emerged which offered medical services and the necessary means for people with disabilities.

In spite of this great advance, the rehabilitation model has had several criticisms, as attendance to classes was compulsory for these pupils with functional diversity. Within them, they were classified according to the educational levels to which they belonged in order to achieve homogeneous groups. This development has been criticised as it ended up becoming a place of mistreatment and marginalisation, as these pupils were not with the rest.

Another common criticism of this stage is the idea that the doctor is over the patient, trying to cover up the differences with these people with functional diversity instead of curing them.

In this century, authors such as Decroly and Montessori stand out. Decroly's main objective was to prepare pupils for life.

Montessori's pedagogy emphasizes personalised education, as she believed that the pace, needs and interests of each individual should be respected. It is for this reason that Maria Montessori is considered a great influence on inclusive education. Throughout her life, Montessori discovered that many of the problems that were labelled 'abnormal' in the medical field were actually pedagogical problems. This Italian doctor and educator believed in respecting each child's individuality and interests.

All victories and all human progress are due to inner strength. Every man has a special tendency and a special latent vocation, perhaps modest but certainly useful' (Maria Montessori, n.d.).

Integrative model or social

The advent of this model came about thanks to the Independent Living Movement (ILM) born in the 20th century, specifically at the end of the 1960s. This movement was driven by people with functional diversity who had previously been discriminated against. In Spain it was created later, around 2001.

This movement was created when Ed Roberts, an American university student with a severe physical disability, attended university for the first time, thus breaking down all barriers both architecturally and socially. This helped to further change the traditional view of disability.

This model pays special attention to the rehabilitation of society at large in order to address the needs of all people, resulting in a more inclusive society.

At the end of the 20th century, a distinction began to be made between impairment and disability. The former is understood as a limitation or even loss in relation to an organ or some part of the body, while disability is the inability to carry out an activity that can be considered a normal or everyday activity in the life of a human being.

Finally, throughout this integrative model, the first approach of special education to the education system in Spain arose thanks to the LGE (Organic Law of General Organization of the Spanish Educational System).

Model inclusive

The last educational model was inclusion. At this stage, pupils with disabilities have the right to feel integrated in an ordinary classroom, with the rest of the pupils. Generally in Spain, it is in this regular classroom where they receive the special support that each student needs.

With regard to teaching, teachers have a common curriculum and various resources according to the educational stage of the pupils, with the difference that pupils with certain needs have this additional support explained above.

On 3 October 1990 the LOGSE (General Organic Law of the Educational System) was passed. This is a Spanish law which replaces the LGE and is based on the principles of normalisation and school integration as for the first time the term pupils with special educational needs (SEN) is created.

It is at this stage that the Index emerges, a set of materials created with the intention of supporting schools to finally achieve the most inclusive education possible. It is considered a necessary material for the self-evaluation of schools in relation to inclusive education policy, culture and practice. It works by setting up a co-ordinating group which works with the school council, students and their families to identify day-to-day barriers in education and solutions to each barrier in order to achieve the highest possible level of inclusion. These meetings help to carry out a detailed examination of the problems to be solved that still remain today.

In conclusion, this evolution of educational models shows us that it has been mainly social and pedagogical circumstances that have put all their strength into tipping the balance more towards the integrating side, leaving behind the rest of the segregating models.

Enabling factors for reaching out to today

Although I have mentioned above what have been the main factors in each educational stage that have caused the evolution of the current model, I will now write a brief summary of all the factors that have really had an influence.

Associations of parents of children with disabilities have helped to continue to claim all the rights they have as human beings, with school attendance and a full education being considered a right.

Scientific advances in specific fields such as medicine, psychology or pedagogy have succeeded in creating a more positive and open view of the abilities of pupils with SEN within the teaching-learning framework at school.

The thoughts of great influences such as the pedagogue Montessori, making society consider each child as a unique individual, leaving behind the fact of grouping them in school by children with the same deficit.

Certain scientific discoveries, including the knowledge that learning opens up avenues for learning how to cope in other environments of life, such as social, cultural, personal, etc., not only academic.

Changes within the education system, achieving an education for all, in which students with disabilities are in the same class as the rest of the students, despite their abilities. In this way, it has been possible to achieve a curriculum for all, which at the same time allows for adaptation to the diversity that may arise.

Finally, progress in certain laws such as the change from the LGE to the LOGSE in Spain managed to further integrate this field of special education within the classroom and in society.

All these developments have led to special education being considered as a part of the mainstream education system, rather than being excluded from it.

Current problems to be solved in special education

Some of the problems we may encounter are:

-There is currently not a large percentage of teachers who know how to respond appropriately to these students with disabilities.

Therefore, the solution I propose would be to take into account the need for good training in the theoretical part and the strategies of attention to diversity on the part of the teaching staff, as well as having the help of counsellors. We must bear in mind that both roles are key in the process of integrating these students into society.

-Improve communication between administrations, schools, pupils and families as it is important that these sectors are always in contact in order to be able to reflect on the inclusive measures they want to implement.

IV. Conclusion

In my opinion, the term special education contains an enormous historical value because behind it are small revolutions that have emerged in each century until we have reached the present one. This evolution has arguably been slow and difficult, but it has been worthwhile as we have managed to get to where we are today. It is important to bear in mind that it is not possible to go backwards and implement past measures. However, it is necessary to recognise that there is still a long way to go to achieve fully inclusive education.

It should be noted that not only has the social support claimed to improve our view of children with disabilities been important, but also the support of certain laws and educational policies has been necessary.

A brief legislative review throughout this document shows that it was not until the end of the 20th century, specifically the last third of the century, that great progress was made thanks to the Education Laws of 1970 and 1990. Law 14/1970, of 4 August 1970, approved basic general education, characterised by the fact that it was compulsory and free for all Spanish citizens. The 1990 law passed on 3 October is known as LOGSE. It is based on the principles of standardisation and school integration.

In relation to special education in the international sphere, it was from the 1990s onwards that the demand for a School for All began to be made. Events were held in different parts of the world calling for an integrated school, without discrimination on the basis of race, sex, religion or disability.

In short, special education only seeks to achieve inclusive education. To achieve this, it is necessary to group all pupils without exception in the same regular classroom, with the same common curriculum according to their educational stage, and if necessary, to provide some specialised attention to those who need it, but if possible within the regular classroom, as it is favourable for pupils with special educational needs to spend as much time as possible with the rest of the pupils.

In order to be able to address the needs of each child individually if necessary, it is essential to have a pool of well-trained teachers with both theoretical and practical knowledge of diversity care.

Nowadays, placement is a more significant part of studies not only in employability but in the international perspective of improving educational quality mainly, by highlighting the need for practical training at diverse provisions. A placement helps with the creation and development of a professional identity. Therefore, the attention to professional identity was paid because single moments, experiences, abilities, feelings, reflections, and other aspects which students experience can help or harm one in their professional career and future employability. Thus, a placement is a place for applying theoretical knowledge and realizing whether the student made the right choice to study their major. Also, it can be seen as motivation for those who are not studying types to finish their studies, so they will be able to do their profession (Stárek, 2022).

However, I would like to end this paper by commenting that although special education seems to be a task only within the school environment, this is not the case. A lot of societal involvement is needed to achieve not only an inclusive education, but more importantly, an inclusive society. Finally, I would like to highlight an idea of Casanova's that we should reflect on.

Inclusive education does not happen spontaneously because a child has open access to mainstream schooling, but that accessibility must be directed towards learning with full rights and equal opportunities with the rest of his or her peers. And to achieve this, we still lack widespread commitment and preparation in the education system as a whole' (Casanova, 2011:18).

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