

Is the Special Education Good in Spain?

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ABSTRACT

Special education in Spain has evolved a lot since Antiquity, but there is still a long way to go and inequalities to resolve. It is a problem that we should pay more attention to and solve as soon as possible so that everyone can receive the education they deserve.

During this text we will see what special education is and its importance. We will review its history and all the laws that have been related to this subject in Spain. Also, we will reflect on the problems that still need to be solved and we will finish with my personal opinion on this subject after having informed myself.

Keywords: children, laws, school, Spain, special education, Spanish laws, special needs.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The topic I have chosen is special education in my country. At present, a lot of progress has been made in this area but there is still a lot to be done and a lot to be improved. In this work we will make a brief summary of the history of special education in Spain, as well as we will see the advances that have been achieved and the problems that still remain to be solved.

In the following paragraph we will define some terms.

Special education is the educational service that offers attention with equity to students with special educational needs or (this part is sometimes forgotten) outstanding aptitudes and in accordance with their conditions, needs, interests and potential.

In education, students with disabilities are those who have one or more sensory, intellectual, physical, or mental impairments. These impairments prevent them from being fully included in school on an equal basis with others. The different types of special needs are:

- 1) Difficulties in managing emotions. This can affect their relationships with others.
- 2) Sensory or physical needs. Here we find some such as hearing or visual impairment, as well as any other that may alter the child's normal development.
- 3) Learning difficulties. Problems may be encountered in learning to read, write, or retain information.
- 4) Problems in the acquisition of basic skills in the school environment.
- 5) Children's difficulties in expressing their emotions and in understanding and empathizing with others.
- 6) Behavioral disturbances. Such as attention deficit disorder or serious mental health disorders that may hinder.

7) Their development.

8) Other health and medical conditions

On the other hand, students with outstanding aptitudes are those who stand out significantly with respect to the social group. The aptitudes in which they may excel are intellectual, socio-affective, psychomotor, artistic and creative.

As we have seen through these definitions, disability can be considered as a problem with personal, family, and social consequences that can lead to social exclusion at school and elsewhere.

Students with special educational needs may experience isolation, self-esteem problems, anxiety, depression, and rejection by their peers. Therefore, it is very important to work with children from a young age on diversity, presenting it as normal and as an advantage.

Attention to these pupils should be given from the moment they are detected, with the pupil's tutor coordinating with the specialist teachers and with the families. Some of these specialists, who can be found both in ordinary schools and, above all, in special education centers, are:

- 1) Social workers: they are responsible for mediating between families and the center. They also advise the family on resources and are part of the teaching staff.
- 2) Psychologists / psych pedagogues: they oversee the process of detection, guidance and follow-up. They may work in sectoral teams or in special education centers.
- 3) Speech therapist: promotes communication, trying to improve it in the area of language, speech and voice.
- 4) Physiotherapists.
- 5) Nurse residents: there will be one or two nurses per center unless there are in-patient cases.
- 6) Sometimes we find sign language interpreters.

The objectives of Special Education are:

- 1) Developing the personality and abilities of students with SEN (special educational needs).
- 2) To develop and work on their personal autonomy.
- 3) To achieve self-determination, i.e., to make the learner the main guide and protagonist of his or her life.
- 4) Preparing them for entry into the social and working world.

The Spanish education system, according to the law, must be inclusive and guarantee equality. To this end, it must be organized to identify specific educational support needs and to provide attention or a response to each student according to his or her needs. There are 5 phases to identify and attend to these needs:

- 1) Prevention: Aimed at all students. Implementation of stimulation and development programs by educational stages.
- 2) Detection: Definition of the signs of special education needs. Protocols of Detection, derivation, and intervention.
- 3) Identification: Presentation of indicators and evaluation instruments for identification in the different stages. Here the psycho-pedagogical evaluation is carried out and the type of need is identified to know the type of response required by the pupil.
- 4) Opinion: Here you can request the intervention of the Specialized Educational Orientation Team. The schooling modality and care proposal are established.
- 5) Organization of the response: Curricular adaptations and specific programs. We differentiate between ordinary educational care and different educational care (Stárek, 2022).

II. HISTORY OF SPECIAL EDUCATION AND LAW

Special Education in Spain has undergone some changes over the years that have made it evolve from a model based on segregation to integration and inclusion.

Before the Middle Ages, people with special needs did not survive birth or were killed after birth. It was in the 16th century that the first specific help for people with sensory deficits appeared. In this century we find people such as Pedro Ponce de León, who did not accept the opinion.

He was convinced that the deaf could not speak and succeeded in teaching a group of deaf people to write, speak and read.

After this, the first of the educational care models (the segregationist model) was produced, and it is here that we can say that special education began to emerge.

With the segregation model, society begins to realize that these people need to be cared for, although here this care is welfare and not so much educational. Some institutions were created on the outskirts of the cities. The deficiencies were treated as illnesses. With the humanist trend of Rousseau, the deaf, mentally handicapped, or blind child began to be considered as susceptible to be educated. Itard, together with other doctors/pedagogues, made a significant contribution to the education of these people, because he showed that with

humane treatment, education could go further than was thought at the time.

The rehabilitative or specialized care model emerged between the 19th and 20th centuries and established the possibility of educating these pupils. This is partly due to the establishment of compulsory education and therefore the need to divide pupils in order to form groups that are as homogeneous as possible. Attention to these pupils was still based on the medical-pedagogical model and rested on three pillars: diagnosis, programmed intervention and evaluation of the results. At this time there were two important authors: Decroly and Montessori.

Decroly had the educational objective of preparing the pupil for life, for which he had to direct stimulation in a double direction: physical environment and education (mental and social).

On the other hand, Montessori demonstrated the importance of motor and sensory education as a basis for access to intellectual education. She thus asserted that the education of these pupils is much more pedagogical than medical.

In the late 1950s, the inclusive model emerged. In some Scandinavian countries, the normalization of students with disabilities began to be discussed, and this ended with the Warnock report, which recognized the right of all children to attend mainstream schools, thus including the principle of integration and SEN.

In Spain, the first approach to special education in the education system took place with the LGE, which served as a basis for the subsequent development of the LOGSE under the principles of normalization and integration.

III. SPANISH LAWS ON SPECIAL EDUCATION

As far as the laws in Spain are concerned, the General Education Law (LGE) of 1970 is the first one in which Special Education is mentioned. A parallel system to the ordinary one was created for these pupils. This law already contemplates two modalities of schooling, one in special centers and the other in units within ordinary centers (LGE, 1970).

The LOGSE brought about the unification of the Spanish education system. This law was based on the principles of normalization and school integration. The term deficient and maladjusted pupils was replaced by pupils with special educational needs. Special Education is no longer conceived as the education of a specific type of pupil but as the set of material and personal resources made available to the education system, so that it can respond adequately to the needs that appear. Among the measures included in this law are curricular adaptations and modifications to enable them to achieve their objectives, as well as the physical and material adaptation of educational centers. Schooling in a special center will only take place when the pupil's needs cannot be met in an ordinary center (LOGSE, 1990).

With the approval of the LOCE, the concept of specific educational needs appears, which includes pupils with special educational needs and gifted pupils. It establishes that pupils may be enrolled in special education centers until the age of 21 (LOCE, 2002).

With the LOE approved in 2006, children with learning difficulties are referred to as pupils with specific educational support needs. It guarantees effective equality in accessing and remaining in the education system (LOE, 2006).

The current regulation in Spain is the LOMLOE, which classifies pupils who receive different educational attention than the ordinary one according to their educational needs:

- 1) Pupils with high intellectual abilities
- 2) Pupils with SEN associated with a disability or severe disorder
- 3) Late entrants to the education system
- 4) Other categories.

This support can be provided during a specific period of the educational stage or continuously and can be carried out in ordinary education centers or in special education centers. The aim is always to ensure that students remain in mainstream schools; in Spain, only 17% do so in a special education center. Therefore, measures to cater for diversity range from educational reinforcement to schooling in special schools. In mainstream schools, pupils usually attend some classes in common with the rest of the pupils, and other specific classes with special education teachers. The response to the educational needs of pupils would be based on two principles: normalization and integration. The principle of normalization refers to providing them with the most normalized educational experiences possible, allowing them to participate in the same activities as the rest. The second refers to schooling and education in the least restrictive environments possible (LOMLOE, 2020).

IV. CURRENT ISSUES OR PROBLEMS TO BE SOLVED

In order to be able to carry out integration, a series of conditions must be met that are often not met in schools.

Firstly, it is essential that the school project includes individualized attention to the needs of each pupil as one of its aims. It must have an adequate programming of guidance and tutorial action, this being essential in order to personalize the teaching- learning process.

Classroom planning also plays a vital role. It must be programmed taking into account the diversity of the students. The general objectives and content must be clearly differentiated between those which are fundamental and those which are complementary.

The methodology should be co-operative, to allow for individualized attention by the teachers. A large number and diversity of activities according to the characteristics and possibilities of the children in the classroom would also be good.

An initial evaluation is necessary to assess where the learner is starting from and to see how he/she has improved by the end of the course.

In Spain, more than 9% of pupils in mainstream schools have special educational needs. This implies the need for a well-trained group of professionals capable of meeting their needs. It is therefore necessary for teachers to be continuously trained and it is also essential that they maintain continuous contact with families in order to understand the behavior of the pupils and to achieve the proposed objectives.

Development and adequate organization of resources and means to be able to respond to the different needs that may arise on a day-to-day basis.

After this analysis of the points that would be necessary for an inclusive school, we realize that although much progress has been made, there are still important aspects that have not been addressed. Among these problems we highlight:

- 1) Problems in the availability and organization of the necessary resources to be able to meet the needs of learners
- 2) Insufficient and uneven implementation of integration programs at secondary level.
- 3) Difficulties on the part of teachers in adapting to the continuous reforms of the law. Added to this is the low interest in innovation and continuous training to respond to this diversity.
- 4) The existence of prejudice towards students with special educational needs, which ends up leading to situations of discrimination, inequality, and disadvantage. In addition, these situations are often not dealt with correctly in the centers or are allowed to go unaddressed.

Some solutions to these problems could be for the law to be accompanied by a funding fund to guarantee the provision of the necessary educational resources. Also, the implementation of a specific program for pupils with special educational needs in secondary education. Finally, investment in awareness campaigns and changes in attitudes towards these pupils.

There are current cases of parents complaining that there are not enough adaptations for their children with ADHD, SLI or ASD. There are known cases of children with special educational needs who have been expelled from regular classrooms or various activities and services due to lack of resources, or lack of the tools and specialized training to cater for these pupils. These parents claim to feel helpless before the law and before the educational institution. Many of them have given up hope that their children will be able to study in mainstream schools and say that their children need the kind of personalized attention that only special education centers can offer them in Spain.

Another case is that of Rubén Calleja, who was forced to leave the ordinary public school where he was studying and enroll in a state-subsidized center because he had Down's Syndrome. The UN issued an opinion in 2018 on the Spanish education system for segregating 17% of students with disabilities, enrolled in special schools instead of providing mainstream schools with the necessary resources. Within 10 years it is expected that mainstream schools will have these resources and that special education centers will be left only for students who require highly specialized attention, and that they will fulfil the function of reference and support centers for mainstream schools.

Situations such as these mean that inclusion in schools does not progress and does not end up being a real inclusion.

V. CONCLUSION

As we have seen throughout these pages, special education has come a long way since its beginnings, but there is still much room for improvement.

Bearing in mind that education for all is a right enshrined in the Spanish constitution, I think this is an issue that we should pay more attention to and resolve as soon as possible.

Each and every child deserves a quality and equal education. For this, as Lukáš Stárek mentions in his text on special education in Spain, it is necessary to know the laws that support these people in order to avoid social exclusion.

In educational institutions, pupils are not treated as different and unique individuals, they are simply required to meet certain minimum standards that they must all meet or else they will be failures. This affects the children's self-esteem; we cannot demand that a fish can walk and that it is no worse than other animals. That is to say, as teachers we have to learn to see the abilities of each pupil and improve them, and to see their low points and teach them to improve them. At the end of the day, the school stage marks our way of being and our future, so we must know how to teach.

From the moment children enter the educational institution (and even earlier by parents) it is important to teach them respect for diversity. Each and every one of us is different from the rest, and none of us is better than the others. We are unique and that is the beauty of it.

As far as mainstream and special schools are concerned, I believe that the latter should start to take a back seat. This would only be possible if both the resources and the teaching staff in mainstream schools were adequately prepared. I think this would be good for children with special needs as they would continue to have individualized and appropriate attention, but they would also have other pupils to interact with. On the other hand, I think that the rest of the pupils would also benefit from being surrounded by diversity and working together from an early age. Both groups could learn from each other and form a great team.

I know that equipping schools with these resources and getting more well-trained teachers in this area is complicated and costly, but it would be a big step forward in special education. Other countries such as Portugal already have a minimum number of students in special schools, I feel that Spain is lagging in this aspect

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