



TEACHING ENGLISH TO CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

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Annotation. The goal of this study is to determine the most appropriate methods and techniques used for Teaching English to children with special educational needs and to determine if they should take the courses in foreign languages in mainstream education or with a supporting teacher. The study is based on a questionnaire applied to teachers of English and on questionnaires answered by children with special educational needs and children without learning difficulties. The findings conclude that teachers are able to teach regular children simultaneously with mainstream children, though these are reluctant regarding the education of children with special educational needs in mainstream education.

Keywords – children with special educational needs, teaching methods, English as a foreign language, mainstream education.

1. Introduction

The study tries to determine whether children with special educational needs (SEN) should learn foreign languages with teachers from mainstream education or with supporting teachers. From the beginning, one has to understand that children with SEN have special needs in terms of education. In Romania, there are special schools that care for the education of children with special needs. However, the Law of National Education 2011 [1] and other national and international laws have tried to integrate these children in mainstream education. The number of children attending special schools has diminished and they are attended especially by children with severe disabilities. It is believed that inclusive education is better for children with SEN than special school education. Therefore at the end of 1995, the Ministry of Resort has adapted the “action plan in favour of children” which stipulates the integration of children with special needs in the community. The document provides models for organizing schools which are regulated on an international level:



- cooperation between special schools and mainstream schools
 - organizing a special class in regular schools
 - preparing a special classroom with resources for children with learning difficulties
 - itinerary teacher, etc. In order to understand who children with SEN are, Vrășmaș, E [2] mentions the most frequent disorders they face:
 - attention deficit: they cannot focus on the lesson;
 - movement deficit: they cannot coordinate their movement;
 - difficulties in processing visual and acoustic information: many students have difficulty in recognizing the sounds of a language but recognize easily the letters and written words;
 - difficulty in developing cognitive learning strategies: certain students are incapable of organizing their activity and developing their own learning style;
 - oral communication disorders: they are the result of poor linguistic abilities, speaking disorders and underdeveloped vocabulary;
 - reading difficulties: they have difficulty in recognizing, decoding and understanding the read words;
 - writing difficulties: they cannot complete tasks which involve writing
 - mathematical difficulties: they have poor mathematics skills, they lack notions of space and time which are used in this subject.
- The English lesson should be very interactive; emphasis must be placed on singing, playing, dancing, drawing. Movement activities are extremely beneficial for children with SEN as most of them have difficulties in staying focused or sitting down. The atmosphere should be pleasant as children feel uncomfortable working under pressure, in stressful situations or in a boring activity. Abstract concept, rules, grammar rules should be avoided as they bring about tension.

2. Goals of study

The goal of this study is to prove that children with SEN can learn English as a foreign language in mainstream education, if teachers adapt the curriculum to the children`s needs and learning style. The study [7] is conducted on 10 English teachers, 90 parents, 90 regular children and 10 children with SEN from the 6th grade.

Research questions

A questionnaire has been applied to the teachers containing the following questions:

1. Do you find inclusive education useful for children with SEN? Give reasons to support your decision.



2. Should teachers of English teach children with SEN without any prior training?

3. Do you consider that children with SEN slow down the teaching pace? Give suggestions to change this situation.

The questionnaire applied to children with SEN contains the following questions:

1. Do you like learning with children who are better at learning than you?

2. Do you find English interesting? Would you like to learn it?

3. Would you prefer learning in a smaller group than with the whole class?

3. Methods

The study is based on the answers provided by a number of 10 English teachers, 90 parents of regular students, 90 regular students and 10 children with SEN. The study has been conducted in “Adam Muller Guttenbrunn” High School of Arad, with the 6th grade (A, B, C), between May 1 and 15, 2014. The questionnaire has been applied to understand the teachers`, parents`and students` perception of children with SEN. Firstly, the answers given by teachers reveal that most of them believe that inclusive education is not beneficial for anyone. They think that regular children are affected by the indiscipline of children with SEN, time is lost due to their difficulty of understanding certain concepts, the overall school performance of a class is lowered by the grades obtained by children with learning difficulties and the curriculum is not completely covered because a lesson needs to be repeated several times. For the second question, they consider that the difficulty of working with children with SEN lies in the teachers` lack of experience in handling these situations. Therefore, most of them agree to attend a lecture on working with students with SEN, if special education remains part of mainstream education. They believe that someone should teach them how to approach English for special educational needs; otherwise it is a waste of time. Methods and techniques should be presented during these workshops and teachers should be taught the best possible methods used with these children.

4. Results

A sample of 25 subjects was selected for the experiment. 20 are regular students and 5 are children with SEN. The pre-test was applied on the 2nd of May 2014 and it consisted of four subjects: one grammar subject, one vocabulary subject, a reading task and a composition. After the pre-test had been assessed, the experimental group took English classes with a teacher who had taken a course in teaching English to inclusive classrooms. The other students continued to



work with their teachers. The unit chosen for the experimental stage is Food and drinks [9]. At the end of the unit, students have to be able to use vocabulary connected to food and drinks in their own sentences, make short dialogues, describe dishes and talk about their favourite food. The detailed lesson project is not the goal of this study; therefore only important techniques are going to be discussed. The teacher used a lot of realia and visual images because the students have visual intelligence [10]. They are asked to repeat the words after the teacher, to draw them and to identify the food item stated by the teacher among other items from a worksheet or PPT presentation. The teacher trains their reading skills too. Children read a short dialogue between a waiter and two guests in a restaurant. They take turns in reading it and then act it out. The groups are homogenous, consisting of regular and children with SEN. The furniture is rearranged and students are allowed to move during the class, making children with kinesthetic intelligence feel more comfortable. Speaking is also encouraged through speaking activities such as presentations or guessing games. The teacher describes an item and the students have to guess or a child describes an object while the rest of them have to guess it. Competition games are not encouraged as they might be too demotivating for children with SEN. The general atmosphere is pleasant and calm. After two weeks, children retake the test. The test items are varied and designed according to modern assessment methods such as: multiple choice, dual choice, true/false and blank

5. Conclusions

The experiment concluded that English can be taught to children with SEN without placing them in special schools. Though certain teachers believe that a foreign language should not be taught to children who still have difficulties with their mother tongue, it is a bad decision. Learning a new language opens their minds, helps them create cognitive relations, organizes their mind and brings.

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