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Lengua y Literatura Inglesa

Teaching a Foreign Language to Students with Special Educational Needs

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## Abstract

This synthesis of studies is aimed at identifying strategies that could help the teaching of foreign languages to students who may present special educational needs in class. For the purpose of this synthesis, fifteen studies were considered and the effectiveness of the strategies found was analyzed on the basis of the perceptions of the participants of each study. All the studies were developed in different contexts, but not all of them were based on English language teaching; some were focused on the teaching of French and German. It is important to mention that even though the aim of this synthesis is the teaching of a foreign language to special needs students, two studies that focus on second language teaching were also included, considering the importance and relevance of the strategies found on the aforementioned studies. Additionally, different educational needs were emphasized in most of the studies; therefore, different strategies and perceptions were found in them.

It is worth mentioning that some effective strategies were found throughout this research, which have helped us demonstrate that a foreign language can be efficiently taught in spite of the educational needs that can be found in class. With the purpose of discovering new strategies, further research is suggested. There is also a need to conduct more studies with teenagers that focus on the perceptions of teachers who deal with special educational needs.

**Keywords:** Foreign language. Teaching. Special Educational Needs. Strategies



## Resumen

La presente síntesis de estudios busca identificar estrategias que puedan ayudar a la enseñanza de una lengua extranjera a estudiantes que presenten necesidades educativas especiales en clase.

Para el propósito de esta síntesis, quince estudios fueron considerados y la efectividad de las estrategias fue analizada basándose en la percepción de los participantes en cada estudio. Todos los estudios fueron desarrollados en diferentes contextos pero no todos ellos se basaron en la enseñanza del inglés; algunos se enfocan en el francés y alemán. Es importante también mencionar que a pesar de que esta síntesis se enfoca en la enseñanza de un lenguaje extranjero a estudiantes con necesidades especiales, se incluyeron dos estudios que se enfocan en un segundo lenguaje debido a la importancia y relevancia que tienen las estrategias encontradas en los estudios mencionados con anterioridad. Adicionalmente, en la mayoría de estudios se enfatizaron diferentes necesidades especiales; por ende, diferentes estrategias y percepciones fueron encontradas.

Se encontraron algunas estrategias efectivas a lo largo de este trabajo de titulación y se pudo demostrar que una lengua extranjera puede ser enseñada de manera eficiente a pesar de las necesidades especiales que se podrían encontrar en el aula. Sugerimos un estudio más extensivo y una capacitación más acertada a los docentes, para que de esa manera se puedan encontrar más estrategias y se las pueda aplicar efectivamente en clases con necesidades especiales. Existe también una necesidad de realizar estudios en adolescentes, así como también estudios que se enfoquen en la percepción de los profesores que trabajan con necesidades especiales.

**Palabras clave:** Lengua extranjera. Enseñanza. Necesidades Educativas Especiales. Estrategias



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## **Dedication**

First of all, I would like to thank God for being my strength throughout my career.

I dedicate this project to my wife and daughter for being my inspiration to finish my university career and this synthesis. I also dedicate this work to my family for being a great support in my life.

I would also like to thank all my Professors for their help throughout the time I spent at the University of Cuenca. Last but not least, I present my gratitude to Gabriela Tobar, MSc, for her guidance for the realization of this graduation project.





## Introduction

Teaching a foreign or second language is a very demanding task, considering the fact that many techniques and strategies need to be applied in the process of teaching or learning languages.

Additionally, it is specially challenging to teach a foreign or second language to students with special needs because of the fact that Special Needs Students (SNS) need a different approach in order to reach their expected level of foreign language acquisition. This special approach, which is sometimes required in foreign language instruction, may result in extra work for both the teacher and student, especially if effective training, techniques, methodologies, and strategies are not applied, this being the reason that it is important to have appropriate knowledge of the problem and how it needs to be dealt with.

This synthesis includes an analysis of the different special needs and strategies used to work with SNS students in second and foreign language classes. In this respect, it is important to consider this variety of special needs and the appropriate approach(es) each one requires. In this research, only those studies which refer to special needs education and strategies used in class have been considered.



## CHAPTER I

### Theoretical Framework

#### Language Learning Disabilities

According to Pokrivčáková (2015), learning abilities refer to the capacity to comprehend and understand. When the ability of learning is disrupted, it is known as a learning disability. These types of disabilities make learners present difficulties to understand what the majority of people can generally learn easily, since they can interfere with learning basic skills, such as reading, writing, listening, or any other language skill. That is what makes a person with a learning disability have special educational needs. A Special Educational Need (SEN) is a learner's condition that requires modifications of content, forms, methods, and approaches to the educational process, to help him/her succeed in learning.

Furthermore, Ganschow et al. (2000) confirm the theory that a language learning disability is not necessarily related to a mental, health, or neurological condition; they also state that a language learning disability, when studying a foreign language, can occur simultaneously with native language difficulties.

When it comes to language learning, some common learning disabilities are dyslexia, Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), autism spectrum disorders, among others. People with special educational needs commonly struggle with literacy or language skills, such as speaking, writing, or reading. Ortiz (1998) concluded that “these difficulties may become more serious over time if an instruction is not modified to address the students' specific needs,” which means that, if learners do not receive appropriate interventions, they will continue to struggle throughout the learning process.



Additionally, the learning experience can become a stressful and humiliating experience (Schwarz, 1997). In that way, the lack of opportune and adequate instruction could widen the gap between students with special educational needs' achievement and that of their classmates. Similarly, there are other factors in language learning that may be considered as a special need at the moment of teaching, like for example segregation, anxiety, or any other problem that students can present, and not necessarily have to be related to a disorder or disability. In this respect, the U.S. Department of Education launched an Act in which they refer to these kinds of special needs as "Hidden Disabilities." They consider that these hidden disabilities should be considered at the moment of adjusting classes or schedules for these students in order to help them be involved in a correct learning process that goes hand in hand with appropriate counseling or therapy.

As mentioned before, language learning disabilities are not necessarily related to a neurological or mental disorder, but, as Sun and Wallach (2014) state, these disabilities are identified as learning difficulties that students present in any area of learning. For the purpose of this study, it is important to mention the areas of language in which students may present disabilities. These areas include phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, pragmatics or a combination of all or some of them together. These problems occur in any context in which a language is learned, whether it is a second or a foreign language context.



## **Second and Foreign Language Learning**

Ganschow (2000) defines second language acquisition as the autonomous way in which a person learns a language that is different from their first one, and it refers to any language in any context in which the target language is the official one. The author specifically focuses on the mastering process and the products that result from this learning, which include syntax, pragmatics, sociolinguistics, cognitive issues, and others.

On the other hand, Ganschow (2000) refers to a foreign language as the schooling process in which language is learned or taught, especially that part of the process that deals with the acquisition of language skills that help special needs students not only comprehend the target language but also interpret and create written and spoken utterances in a foreign language.

As previously mentioned, problems in acquiring a language are present in second as well as in foreign language contexts, this being the reason that Stubbs (2008) recommends the use of the correct strategies and processes to include special needs students in class.

## **Inclusive Education**

According to Stubbs (2008), inclusive education refers to a set of processes, activities, and strategies created to allow everyone to access the universal right to quality and appropriate education. Inclusive education seeks to acknowledge and respect the existence of diversity in any educational setting and to combat discrimination by promoting participation of everyone. In this sense, differences in age, gender, ethnicity, health status disabilities, and other forms of differences are respected. Inclusive education is being increasingly promoted and supported nowadays. However, there still exists a limited understanding among teachers and society about special educational needs.



Westwood and Graham (2009) talk about the influence of segregating special needs students. They believe that it is important to provide disabled students with a similar range in quality, education, and social enrolment, with the purpose of making them feel at the same level as the rest of the students. This is going to let them know they have equal opportunities to learn at one same range. Many special educational needs can be found in one class. These special educational needs may all differ depending on the kind of disability students have. The different disabilities this synthesis is based on are discussed below.

### **Dyslexia**

Dyslexia is a term that refers to specific difficulties in learning to spell and read and is related to the process of encoding and decoding words. According to DiFino & Lombardino (2004), dyslexia may be understood as the difficulty to form adequate phonological representations of the sounds of language, and, therefore, it affects an individual's ability to manipulate and remember sound and letter sequences. This disorder is commonly discovered when children begin school education, and it can affect their learning process and cause multiple academic disadvantages. Meschyan and Hernandez (2002) show that most people with dyslexia struggle with second language learning just as they struggle with their native language.

### **Dysgraphia**

Engel-Yeger, Nagauker-Yanuv, and Rosenblum (2009) refer to dysgraphia as a problem related to handwriting. They explain that dysgraphia is the difficulty some people have to produce written language, especially when it comes to handwriting. The authors consider this problem is directly related to both the ability to read clearly and write at low speed.



In addition to this, Pokrivčáková et al. (2013) state that dysgraphia affects the transformation of verbal messages into writing. They also enumerate some signals that people with dysgraphia may present. For instance, the way a person holds a pencil may mean he/she has illegible handwriting; other examples that show someone may suffer from dysgraphia include leaving poor or too much spacing between words, omitting words constantly, having difficulty organizing thoughts, and even having problems to organize sentences that are grammatically correct. The authors also enhance teachers to pay more attention to these kinds of special needs students who are trying to learn a foreign language have because they present problems at the moment of learning the basic skills, especially writing.

### **ADD / ADHD**

Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a disorder characterized by inattention, distractibility, impulsivity, and hyperactivity that occur in any setting, such as home, school, work, and other social settings (Silver, 1995). For this reason, it is important to provide students with educational interventions to help them perform better (Barkley, 1990; Fowler, 1991). It is important to highlight that students suffering from ADD/ADHD commonly face difficulties learning and have poor academic performance, this being the reason that we have included this disorder in our research.

According to Rief (2008), some characteristics and symptoms of students with ADD/ ADHD include difficulty remembering and following directions, difficulty sustaining attention to tasks that are perceived as boring, and difficulty getting started on tasks which many times are reflected in incomplete assignments. In language learning skills, most academic difficulties refer to reading and writing skills. In the case of reading activities, students present symptoms like losing their pace when reading, not focusing on what is being read, which results in poor



comprehension of a text. On the other hand, in the case of writing activities, students can go off the topic easily. Also, it is common to find poor use of capitalization and punctuation, spelling mistakes, and poor ability to edit written work.

## **Down Syndrome**

Bird, Cleave, Trudeau, Thordardottir, Sutton, and Thorpe (2005) clarify that children with Down Syndrome (DS) present various intellectual difficulties, including language deficit, which is caused by a trisomy in the 21st chromosome, which means the existence of an extra chromosome that most commonly causes mental retardation. Additionally, Champman (1997) mentions some difficulties found in the area of language acquisition that vary among lexical comprehension and sentence production, as well as verb and grammatical morpheme recognition. Bird et al. (2005) also mention the poor amount of research done in the area of DS in relation to foreign language learning and enhance the importance of guided support for children with this kind of syndrome in order to prevent the problems the acquisition of a first language may represent and the difficulties they may face when learning a second language.

## **Hidden disabilities and social educational needs**

When we talk about situations that cause difficulties at the moment of learning, it is necessary to consider what some researchers say regarding the fact that not only mental or physical disabilities are the main cause of learning problems. It is also necessary to consider some other important factors that influence on the development of a person at the moment of learning something. Chalkley and Waterfield (2001) state that some medical problems are to be considered, like mental health, as well as social problems and anxiety. On the other hand, Adewumi et al. (2007) consider it necessary to take into account other social problems like



discrimination and segregation at the moment of teaching. The authors believe that these kinds of problems also affect the students' school development.

Chow and Skuy (2016) refer to this kind of problem as non-verbal learning disabilities. The aforementioned authors state that people who present non-verbal learning disabilities can also show difficulties in visual, spatial, organizational, and psychomotor abilities, and they can have problems with reasoning, conceptual thinking, and social interaction. These authors also consider that all these cognitive impediments represent a great problem at the moment of acquiring information, which includes learning a language, because, as these authors mention in their paper, students who learn a new language sometimes feel nervous or even reach a level of anxiety when they participate or try to respond to commands in a classroom. This kind of anxiety can appear because students tend to be afraid of making a mistake when pronouncing or producing information in the target language, or simply they feel as if they are not completing the task appropriately.





## **CHAPTER II**

### **Literature Review**

Different authors have carried out research studies on students with special needs aiming at finding different strategies to help them overcome their foreign or second language learning problems. Abrams (2008) comments on how important it is for foreign and second language teachers to help learners with disabilities have a successful learning experience.

In this section, a review of the existing literature is presented. The studies have been classified into the following categories: Teaching English as a foreign language to dyslexic students, teaching a second or a foreign language to students with dysgraphia, teaching a foreign language to students with ADHD, teaching a foreign language to students with the Down syndrome, teaching a foreign language to students with several educational needs, and teaching a foreign language to students with social educational needs. These studies are summarized below.

#### **Teaching English as a Foreign Language to Dyslexic Students**

According to Erkan et al. (2012), dyslexia is a disability considered to have a neurological origin and, for that reason, it causes language learning difficulties, like for example lack of accurate or fluent word recognition, difficulty to read, poor vocabulary and background knowledge, among others.

Erkan et al. (2012) conducted a study on a 14-year old, 8th-grade elementary school student. The study was carried out in a foreign language context in Turkey and the authors used different instruments to collect their data -observation, interviews, worksheets, exams, and documents such as work done by the student- over a period of six weeks. For the study, each researcher



observed the student and registered information which seemed relevant for them. Finally, they compared their notes to complete the analysis and draw conclusions. During the six-week observation, different approaches were applied along with several techniques, like the multi-sensory approach. Additionally, the step by step approach was applied, which consisted of a process in which the teacher started working and helping the student and then gradually let him work more independently. The results of the study showed that the participant became a more confident student and his language knowledge grew gradually. Additionally, it was demonstrated that applying motivational strategies, like for example including the tutor's support and having a positive attitude with the student, helped him succeed in their second language acquisition. Not leaving apart feelings and rebuilding students' self-esteem were effective strategies that positively influenced their performance more than just focusing on the progress of the different language skills. Finally, the importance of a step by step process in which participants went from guided to individual practice was recommended and turned out to be effective.

Wu (2009) developed a study focused on two people who were diagnosed with dyslexia. One of them was a student in a teacher education program and the other one was a Ph.D candidate. Both were university students of French as a second language and the study took place in Canada. The data were collected during an interview in which they were asked about their previous experience as learners, specifically about the strategies their teachers used to help them effectively reach the desired level of the foreign language they were learning. The strategies reported by each participant were different. Candidate A reported strategies like typing instead of writing and a large preparation for activities or projects that were supposed to be developed in class. Candidate B reported the use of a "text to speech" software to compensate for his slow pace when reading.



It is also important to mention the motivational aspect, as family support, which greatly facilitated his learning. This was found to be a new strategy. In the case of student A, it was demonstrated that parent teaching and support facilitated language learning. On the other hand, participant B did not receive any support because his family did not acknowledge his disability; therefore, learning was difficult and seen as negative. In this case, the student felt frustrated because he found no support in his own home, while student A felt confident due to his family and teachers' help.

Szatzker (2017) conducted a research study on 13 former foreign language students. Their average age was 28 and most of them were diagnosed with dyslexia at the age of 17. They were all English-speaking students in Hungary, and their target languages were German, Italian, Spanish, and French. A guided interview with these students revealed that the strategy used in this study was the incorporation of tutoring classes that helped them reach a good level in their target languages. They received both special and emotional support in developing the target language.

Finally, the author concluded that family support positively influenced on students suffering from dyslexia. He also emphasized on both the importance of an emotionally stable background and peers and teachers support. On this occasion, the participants showed a great feeling of success and revealed that their needs were a contribution to fulfill goals in the future rather than a difficulty. This shows that the techniques used in this study were considered to be effective.



## **Teaching a Second or a Foreign Language to Dysgraphic Students**

As it was previously mentioned, dysgraphia is a condition related to problems and impairments in writing, which directly affects a student's language learning.

Abrams (2008) conducted a study with a student who was seeking to get his bachelor's degree and was diagnosed with dysgraphia. He aimed at finishing a German course so as to obtain his desired degree. Due to the student's special needs, an adaptation to his curriculum was made. The teacher was asked to give him a copy of the notes taken in class, volunteer assistance, more time for completing tests and writing assignments, exams with less difficulty, and access to a computer.

As a conclusion for this curricular adaptation application, it was found that, in most cases, it was necessary for special needs students to go first through a period of failure, which purpose was to let them show lack of understanding and low grades so that they may have access to the help they needed. In this respect, adapting the curriculum was important because it not only provided a positive influence in learning a foreign language, but also it gave solutions to some of the students needs and at the same time encouraged their strengths and abilities.

Abram (2008) and Al Awad (2019) got interested in dyslexic students learning a second or foreign language, but they went further and found a connection between dyslexia and dysgraphia. They stated that dysgraphia may not occur alone, since it appears in some people accompanied by problems related to spelling and handwriting. These students show they have difficulty writing and reading.



Al Awad (2019) directed a study on English as a second language class in Saudi Arabia. The study was conducted on girls from 4th to 6th grade who presented both dysgraphia and dyslexia. The author mentioned the importance of keeping in mind that the problems shown in the first language have a great influence when learning a second language.

An interview revealed that one of the strategies mentioned in this study, the instructional method, consisted of a two-way learning strategy, which involves the students' more active participation. They are given additional time to complete activities and they are usually involved in video presentations, posters, drawings, and other helpful elements that support teaching the English language to the dyslexic learner. Finally, the author concluded that the students felt more confident with strategies like dividing sentences into pieces and allowing students to correctly complete them.

### **Teaching a Foreign Language to ADHD Students**

Cadagan and Palma (2016) agree with Villalobos (2011) when they recognize that ADHD is a common problem among students all over the world. They comment that teaching a foreign language has become a challenge not only for teachers but also for parents.

Villalobos (2011) carried out a study with an EFL student in Costa Rica. The participant was a fourteen-year-old student whose native language was Spanish and was diagnosed with ADHD. The study consisted of 4 observations and 4 work sessions with the student. In each session, different techniques were applied and the researcher constantly observed how the student made progress. It was mandatory to describe the work sessions and the strategies applied to understand their importance.



In the first session, the researcher met with the student fifteen minutes before the class to choose a specific color and picture for his English notebook. The decision was made on the basis of the students' preferences. The student was also asked to use a highlighter whenever he found some important information; likewise, he had to carry a small calendar so he could keep control of his assignments and duties. Finally, his positive and negative progress was controlled on a chart.

During the second session, the researcher suggested that all the classes were recorded for the student to go back to them each time he needed to remember information about a class. Over the course of the third session, a set of physical assignments were given; the student was in charge of cleaning the whiteboard, and collecting and distributing the material in the class. Also, the teacher and student agreed on a signal to express that the participant was behaving badly or doing something wrong.

Ultimately, in the last session, a folder was chosen for the kid to put all his English material in it. He also had to put a pencil across the page when he was reading so he could focus on the words. According to the author, the participant showed excitement and progress, cooperation, and interest during the implementation of the plan. He also concluded that ADHD can be effectively treated by using the correct strategies in class. Moreover, not only did the participant make good progress but also developed independent learning because he was able to take more responsibilities.

Cadagan and Palma (2016) developed a study that focused on 3 English teachers from both a public and a private high school in Chile and the strategies employed to teach vocabulary to ADHD students. The data were collected through a semi-structured interview to the teachers. Among the main strategies, it was found that teachers used: 1. Cooperative learning -they grouped students to work together and help each other; they also commented that scaffolding



occured when interacting with peers. 2. Controlling the pace of the class, which the authors discussed it was not always necessary, but it was used anyway. 3. TPR, in which the participants suggested it was a good and useful strategy.

The authors recommend to consider that there exist extra factors that affect the correct development of the class, like the number of students and the learning styles that each one of them has.

Correspondingly, the authors think it is a good idea to use cooperative learning, control the pace, and TPR. Finally, strategies like drills, reading, and speaking were mentioned, but the authors did not consider them to be useful because they believe that these strategies did not satisfy all the needs of these students.

### **Teaching a Foreign Language to Down Syndrome Students**

Cardenas and Cifuentes (2017) recognize the Down Syndrome as an important area in which language teachers should get special training. They carried out a study in Gimnasio Colombo Andido School in Bogota, in which the main participants were two girls and two boys whose age ranged from 10 to 13 years old. These students belonged to a low social stratum and presented difficulties related to articulation of words, long term memory, motor skills, a short attention span, and poor development at listening, but, on the other hand, they were good at visual memory, writing and artistic skills, which helped to support the learning process of English as foreign language.

Through the use of different instruments like interviews, surveys, and observations, it was found that some techniques were applied in order to help students with DS overcome their difficulties. Among the techniques found, we can mention the following: use of visual materials in the



classroom, traditional techniques like drilling or interaction in class by formulating and answering questions, and the use of motivational techniques like cooperative working and the creation of a supportive environment.

The results of the research showed that students were able to recognize and memorize vocabulary. Also, they responded to some orders in a good manner. Additionally, the teachers perceptions were positive and expressed that students felt motivated and that the use of these different techniques helped them to interact more. The authors also remarked the importance of visual support, which both transmitted confidence to the students and made them interact with their peers and teacher; therefore, their social skills improved.

A second study was conducted by Alemi and Bahramipour (2019) on an EFL classroom in The Down Syndrome Center of Iran (DSCI). The participants were 10 adults (4 women and 6 men) who had the Down Syndrome and presented a similar cognitive level; they were around 30 years old. At the beginning of the study, a test was administered to all students in order to determine their vocabulary knowledge. After that, the students were divided into 2 groups of 8 regular classes related to the same vocabulary. The only difference was that group 1 had a humanoid robot which acted as a teacher assistant and group 2 had regular classes with no exterior help. The robot had a nice and sweet voice which gave the students a sense of confidence and kindness. Every day the robot was programmed with specific vocabulary and instructions to clear up the students's doubts. It also interacted with the class and helped them develop vocabulary and social interaction. Finally, a second test was administered in order to determine if there was any difference in the amount of vocabulary that had been learned after the second class.





The result of this study revealed that the use of the robot in the class had a positive effect. The vocabulary learned in group one was significantly higher than the one learned in group two. The perceptions of the teachers were positive since they noticed that the kind voice of the robot made the students feel calm and secure at the moment of interacting. It also helped them feel confident whenever they needed to ask or clarify any doubt that came out throughout the development of the classes.

The authors finally talked about the problems DS students have when communicating. With the purpose of helping them overcome this problem and acquire the second language skills, they put special emphasis on the need of early interventions.

### **Teaching a Foreign Language to Students with Several Educational Needs**

In a second study conducted by Abrams (2008), a student with multiple physical and mental disabilities was the participant. He presented a quadriplegic state accompanied by neurological symptoms. The instrument used in this study was an adaptation of an alternative curriculum. This adaptation included a plan of studies that aimed at having a low significant impact on the participant. The adaptation had to do with reading activities related to his quizzes and oral exams, and an additional reorganization of homework and extra sessions of study.

The study results were similar to the results mentioned in a previous category. It was necessary to implement a curricular adaptation so that special needs students had the opportunity to experience a positive practice in a foreign language class. It was also important to acknowledge the position in which some of these students were put through before being able to access the necessary help.



Vojtková and Kašpárková (2019) developed a study in which they decided on the techniques and strategies to be used to teach French to 31 special needs students in grade six. Their ages ranged from 11 to 12 years. The study was developed in rural and urban areas and the special needs identified in these learners varied among cognitive delay, Autism, speech impediment, Attention Deficit Disorder, Asperger's Syndrome, Down Syndrome, Oppositional Defiant Disorder, and Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder.

Through a guided interview, the strategies that were identified were scaffolding, repetition, providing examples, and use of partners. In order to help the development of speaking, the students used phrase starters, gesturing, brainstorming, oral support, and dictionaries. Teachers also used technological resources like smartboards and made use of games, which made their classes more interesting. Finally, music and continuous performances in front of the class were tools used in this intensive French classes.

At the end of the courses, it was evidenced that the students were able to communicate in French by using basic structures. They also made big progress in a short time, as well as they paid less attention to their disadvantages in the target language acquisition. They seemed to have a feeling of accomplishment and felt good about speaking the target language. By and large, they presented a positive attitude towards French.

### **Teaching a Foreign Language to Students with Social Educational Needs**

Joy and Murphy (2012) claim that inclusive education has an important goal, which is to give all students similar opportunities to participate, especially the ones who are victims of exclusion caused by social discrimination.



Marwan (2016) directed a study which involved 100 university students who had a low or intermediate level of English as a foreign language. The problem the students had was anxiety caused by gender and learning a foreign language.

A survey was conducted with the participants and it was found that the strategies which were more frequently used were preparation, relaxation, positive thinking, and working with the help of their peers. Positive thinking and peer working were more evident in male participants. It was also stated that none of the participants felt the need to stop trying and participating in class, but it was important to identify what had caused their anxiety and cope with it more easily.

A study by Çetinkaya (2011) took place in Turkey. It was a study related to anxiety in reading. The participant was aged 27; he obtained a Major in Teaching English as a Foreign Language, and was seeking to get a Ph.D in the same field. The information was gathered in a period of 11 weeks through an interview, protocols, and strategies used by the student to cope with his anxiety when reading in the target language.

It was finally found that some strategies used by the participant were effective for dealing with anxiety, like for example using visual support in texts, underlining, quotating, using key words, using a digital dictionary, and most importantly reading before going to sleep, which helped him recall information better. Additionally, the author reminds the importance of improving self-esteem in students considering the fact that it makes a significant positive impact during their learning process. The author also enhances strategies like the functional use of a dictionary and the abovementioned strategies in order to help learners build their own vocabulary.



One last study conducted by Adewumi et al. (2007) was analyzed. The participants were eight teachers, 10 principals, and 5 officials from Fort Beaufort District. They were interviewed in order to find out how they coped with discrimination and segregation in South African schools.

The interview revealed that a special curriculum adaptation was applied to students who had this social educational need. It was also appreciated that some of the teachers did not adapt their curriculum because of poor timing and lack of training in this area. On the other hand, some strategies were identified in various teachers who used them to help special needs students, like for example giving remedial work or activities taken from lower classes. Finally, it was found that in some cases teachers utilized different strategies from the ones that were recorded on their planning, though it was also evidenced that, by using strategies like the aforementioned ones - lowering the level of the tasks, remedial and extra work-, gave good results. Thus, the study states that curricular adaptation and permanent training should go hand in hand to achieve the goal of helping learners with disabilities to cope with their problems in learning a second language.



## **CHAPTER III**

### **Methodology**

The methodology used to obtain relevant articles and studies related to the topic in order to develop this research synthesis included the parameters detailed below.

The information was obtained from online databases, such as Google Scholar and ERIC. The criteria used to select the articles considered empirical studies mainly with the purpose of getting the proposed objectives. Also, articles published and thesis projects were taken into account. Finally, the articles selected were not older than 15 years, which means articles published from 2004 on, to get information about teaching strategies related to recent experiences.

A combination of the following aspects was used to look for the articles: (a) teaching strategies, (b) special educational needs, (c) second language learning, (e) learning a second language, (f) inclusion, and (g) curricular adaptation. Also, studies with qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods were considered in this study. Additionally, the sources were only digital because they facilitated the task of accessing research on this issue.

During the process of analysis of articles, a coding process was used to classify information in accordance with the different categories that emerged throughout the process.



## CHAPTER IV

### Analysis

Fifteen studies were collected from different sources for this research synthesis. The studies were classified according to the year of publication, participants, strategies applied, and perceptions towards the strategies used.

#### Year of Publication

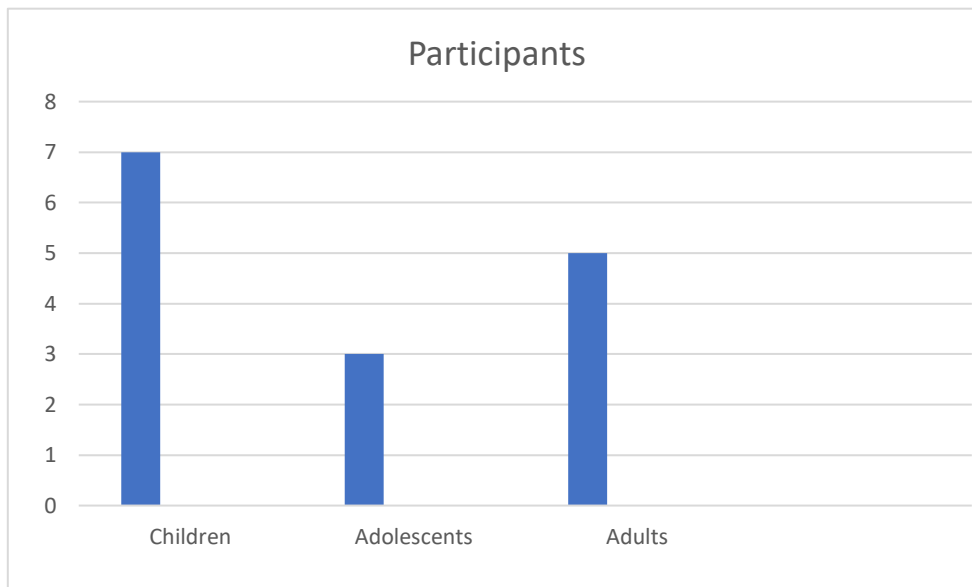
*Table 1. Year of Publication*

Year of publication	Number of studies
2007-2009	5
2011-2019	10

N=15

In Table 1, it can be seen that the studies were divided into two periods according to the year in which they were published. 33.33% (5) were first published between 2007 and 2009, while 66.67% (10) were published between 2011 and 2019. This shows that only a few studies have been done on this important area of education.

It has been demonstrated that teaching a foreign language to special needs students is a relatively new topic nowadays, considering the fact that only a few research studies have been carried out so far. Moreover, researchers are getting interested in the topic as the number of research studies between 2011 and 2019 has increased.

**Table 2. Participants****Participants**

N=15

Table 2 shows that, during the time period mentioned above, there was a higher number of research studies that focused on children with special needs. Moreover, adults were the second group which researchers showed interest in and the smallest number of studies concentrated on teenagers. It is important to identify the different groups of participants because the strategies and perceptions of each methodology applied varied depending on the age group.

**Analysis of the Strategies Found**

The purpose of the Table below is to answer the questions stated at the outset of this synthesis: “Which teaching strategies have been reported as the most efficient to teach a second language to special educational needs students?” and “What are the students and teachers’ perceptions towards the strategies used in class with students with special needs?” The answers



to these questions let us identify the appropriate strategies to be used in class and the perceptions helped us decide whether they were effective or not.

**Table 3. Strategies Used**

Strategy	Techniques
Educational	Scaffolding, charts, and application of alternative use of curriculum
Motivational	Support received from teachers, family members, and self-motivation in and outside the classroom
Technological	Digital gadgets: Computers, digital dictionaries, interactive boards A humanoid robot

N=15

As shown in Table 3, the strategies have been gathered into three categories: motivational, educational, and technological in order to facilitate this part of the analysis. Educational strategies refer to all the strategies used inside the classroom; for example, scaffolding, charts, and application of alternative use of the curriculum. Motivational strategies refer to the help and support received from teachers and family members; for instance, step by step strategies and emotional support in and outside the classroom. Finally, technological support refers to any digital gadget that was used in the studies and that positively helped to the acquisition of the target language in class.



**Table 4. Special Needs and Strategies**

Special need	Strategy	Participants	Students' and teachers' perceptions	Result
<b>ADHD</b>	-educational -motivational  (drills, reading, speaking)	adolescents and adults	students: excitement cooperation interest  Teachers: Do not recommend these strategies for ADHD students	-Progress in language use -Independent learning  Not useful
<b>Dyslexia</b>	-educational -motivational	-children -adolescents -adults	-confidence -feeling of success  Changed their perception about their disability positively	-effective language use -started to grow gradually
<b>Dysgraphia</b>	-educational -technological	children and adults	confidence	-positive influence -encourage strengths
<b>Down Syndrome</b>	-educational -motivational -technological	children and adults	-students: feel confident and secure -social interaction improved	vocabulary was learnt in a greater amount
<b>Several special needs</b>	-educational. -technological	-adolescents -adults	students: -confidence -positive influence Teachers: believe that these strategies strengthened the students' skills	-contribution to the development of the target language -call the students' attention more easily
<b>Social Educational needs</b>	-educational -motivational -technological	adults	feel positive and motivated	positive and effective results were found

N=15



In the first part of Table 4, it can be seen that in the case of students with ADHD, educational strategies were applied to adults and adolescents whose ages ranged from 14 years old to university level. Participants felt excited during this process and also showed a lot of cooperation and interest. The studies showed the participants' progress in independent language learning and use. Nevertheless, Cadagan and Palma (20016) mentioned that teachers had a negative perception about strategies like drills, reading, and speaking to treat ADHD because they consider these strategies are commonly used with regular students and also with special needs students, which makes no difference in the way of teaching both kinds of students.

In order to work with dyslexia in the classroom, the authors applied educational and motivational strategies to children, adolescents, and adults. The participants showed confidence and a feeling of success; they also said they felt their needs were not an impediment to learn and simply moved ahead to fulfill their goals. The authors considered the strategies were effective and the results showed how the participants' language learning gradually progressed.

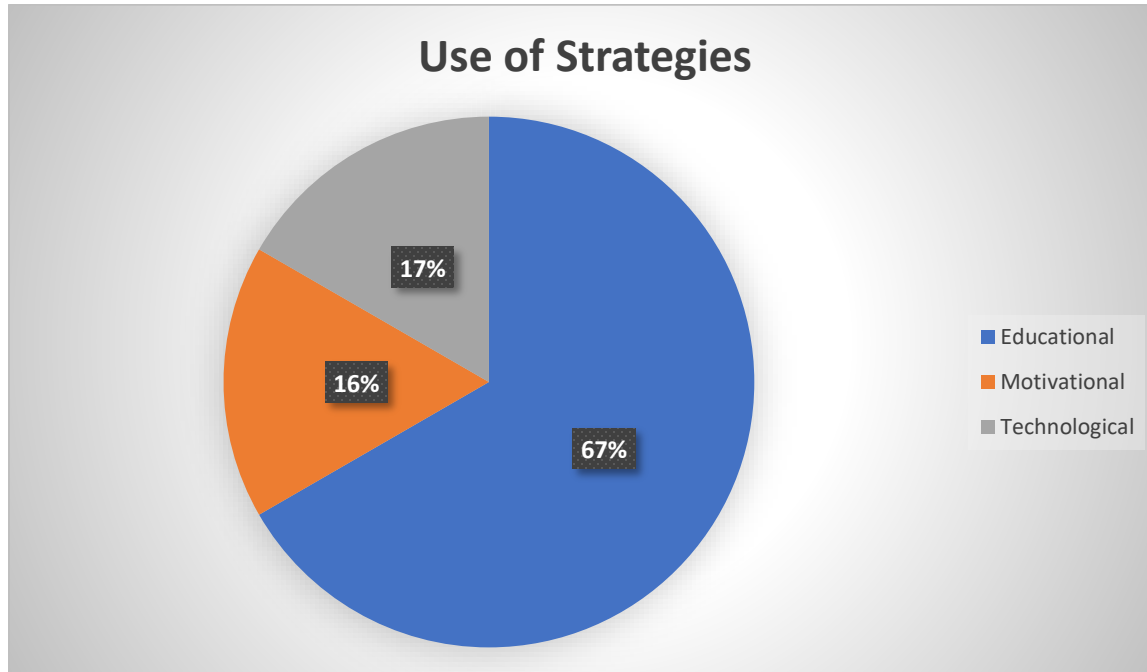
In the case of dysgraphia, the authors applied educational and technological strategies to help children and adults with their problems. The participants revealed a sense of confidence with these strategies, which resulted in a positive influence and also helped to encourage the students' strengths.

When analyzing the cases of Down Syndrome, it was found that the researchers used educational, motivational, and technological techniques in children and adults, which resulted in a greater vocabulary acquisition and a great sense of confidence and security in the classroom. Also, it was found that the skill of social interaction improved when these techniques were applied.



In the case of students with several educational needs like Quadriplegia, neurological problems, autism, speech impediment, Attention Deficit Disorder, Asperger's Syndrome, Down's Syndrome, educational and technological strategies were used. In this case, an alternative curriculum was applied. Vojtková and Kašpárková (2019) reported the use of interactive whiteboards, recorders, and easy access to computers. These strategies reflected the students' confidence and a positive influence on the participants. Teachers also believed these strategies strengthened the language skills of students with special needs. The use of these strategies in the classroom resulted in a good contribution to the development of the participants' target language and revealed that applying these strategies helped call the students' attention more easily.

Finally, in the case of social educational needs, three strategies were used: educational - use of visual support through charts and pictures; motivational -relaxation and self encouragement; and technological - use of digital dictionaries, computers, and other kinds of software. The studies focused more on adults who revealed positive perceptions by feeling encouraged in the classroom when these strategies were applied. Also, due to the positive attitude showed by the students, the authors considered these strategies were effective.

**Table 5. Use of strategies**

N=15

In this analysis, all the 15 studies were taken into consideration because it was important to know what strategies were reported as effective for the students' needs and age. As discussed above, the studies have been grouped in a similar way as they were grouped in the literature review in order to make it easier to identify the studies and the strategies used in each one.

As it can be observed in Table 5, the use of educational strategies occurred more frequently than motivational and technological strategies. Educational strategies were used in 69% of the cases of special needs as analyzed in this synthesis, while motivational studies were used in 16% of the cases and technological strategies were used in 15% of the cases.



## CHAPTER V

### Conclusions and Recommendations

#### Conclusions

Teaching a second or foreign language can be challenging, but it is even harder when students have special needs. This occurs not only because teachers need to put more effort and time to focus on these students, but also because different approaches and techniques have to be applied to help SEN students to reach their language goals productively.

Students have different special needs that require different strategies. Most of the time only educational needs are taken into account and social needs are left behind. Therefore, this implies that different approaches have to be applied to each special need. This has become a problem for teachers considering the fact that little research has been carried out in this area. Also, teachers do not have appropriate preparation to face these kinds of problems that frequently arise in the classroom, as stated by Schwarz (1997). Moreover, it is important to recognize that not only the strategies vary depending on the students' disability but it is also necessary to take into consideration the learner's age. Additionally, it was evidenced that most educational needs are treated by using educational strategies, such as scaffolding, group and peer work, visual support, extra material, among others. Conversely, it can be seen that little has been investigated in the case of emotional and technological strategies. On the other hand, most studies have focused on the students' perceptions, leaving apart the teachers' perceptions, which are of major importance, due to the fact that they are the ones who are working directly with the students; therefore, their experience and knowledge of the topic could be a great contribution for future studies.



To conclude, and on the basis of our analysis, we think that various effective strategies can be applied in a classroom that has special needs students. Villalobos (2011) states that a second language can be effectively taught if the correct strategies are applied. On the other hand, it is important to keep in mind that not all strategies can be used with all kinds of special needs students. Cadagan and Palma (2016) and Villalobos (2011) agree on the importance of doing more research in the area of special education in order to find more effective strategies to be used and applied in foreign and second language classes.

### **Recommendations**

During the development of this research, we were able to prove that there is a need to develop studies and investigate emotional and technological strategies that can be applied in the classroom. In this way, teachers can help educational needs students to reach their educational goals. Additionally, it is recommended to develop studies and investigations in which the new technological strategies start to be used in the classroom. One good example of it is the robot humanoid, which provided confidence and security to the students in the classroom.

Above all, more research on special educational needs in second and foreign language classrooms should be conducted, and more strategies and techniques need to be found to help foreign language teachers to develop their work more efficiently.

Finally, this synthesis has made it evident the need for conducting more studies on teenagers, considering the fact that only a few studies have been carried out so far regarding this important age group. We think it would be great that researchers take into account the perceptions of the teachers who deal with special needs students because we are sure they might contribute with great ideas to improve the teaching of a foreign or second language to special needs students.



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