

# *Lack of Materials in the teaching of English and its Impact in an Inclusive Public High School Classroom*

## *Carencia de Materiales en la Enseñanza del Inglés y su Impacto en un Aula Pública Inclusiva de Secundaria*

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Laura Daniela Rojas Salazar  
Universidad Distrital Francisco José de Caldas  
[ladrojass@correo.udistrital.edu.co](mailto:ladrojass@correo.udistrital.edu.co)

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### **Resumen**

Este documento tiene como objetivo documentar al lector acerca del concepto del autismo, su evolución, características, diagnóstico y tratamiento. Además, presenta a los materiales como un pilar fundamental en el proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje de una lengua extranjera a nivel general y aún más en ambientes inclusivos. Así mismo, ilustra que estos necesitan de diferentes estrategias y metodologías educativas para ser implementados en el aula. El estudio fue llevado a cabo con 40 adolescentes de grado séptimo del Colegio Silveria Espinosa de Rendón I.E.D. Treinta y siete de ellos eran neurotípicos y tres habitaban el espectro autista. Los participantes se encontraban en un rango de edad de 12 a 14 años y tenían un nivel A2 según el Marco Común Europeo de Referencia (MCER).

La intervención contó con tres etapas. La primera consistió en realizar observación participativa. Posterior a esta, se desarrollaron micro actividades orientadas al refuerzo de los tópicos trabajados en la clase de inglés, cada una de ellas fue aplicada en las sesiones correspondientes durante un mes. Por último y trabajando en conjunto con el personal docente y el departamento de psicología, se realizó una adaptación del currículo de grado 7° en el área de inglés, considerando las necesidades educativas funcionales de la población; así como también el diseño, adaptación y adición de diferentes materiales, actividades y estrategias educativas. Esta adaptación e implementación se realizó con el fin de que todos los estudiantes lograran los objetivos propuestos para el curso y que los contenidos fueran accesibles para todos. Dichas adaptaciones serán ejecutadas a gran escala en un futuro cercano con los demás grados y áreas considerando los requerimientos de cada una de ellas.

**Palabras claves:** autismo, currículo, inglés, materiales, lengua extranjera, necesidades educativas funcionales.

## **Abstract**

This document aims to document the reader about the concept of autism, its evolution, characteristics, diagnosis, and treatment. Also, it presents the materials as a fundamental pillar in the teaching-learning process of a foreign language at a general level and even more in inclusive environments. Likewise, it illustrates that materials need different educational strategies and methodologies to be implemented in the classroom. The study was carried out with 40 seventh-grade teenagers from the Silveria Espinosa de Rendón I.E.D. Thirty-seven of them were neurotypical and three were on the autism spectrum. The participants were in an age range of 12 to 14 years and had an A2 level according to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR).

The intervention had three stages. The first consisted of conducting the participatory observation. After this, micro-activities were developed aimed at reinforcing the topics worked on in the English class, each one of them was applied in the corresponding sessions for a month. Finally, and working jointly with the teaching staff and the psychology department, an adaptation of the 7th-grade curriculum was adapted in the English language area, considering the functional educational needs of the population, as well as the design, adaptation, and addition of varied materials, activities, and educational strategies. The adaptation and implementation were carried out with the purpose that all students achieved the objectives proposed for the course and that the contents were accessible to all. These adaptations will be executed on a large scale in the near future with the other grades and areas considering the requirements of each of them.

**KeyWords:** autism, curriculum, English, foreign language, functional educational needs, materials.

## **Introduction**

It is a constant that public schools at the global and local levels are permeated by different aspects that can significantly affect the academic performance of high school students. These situations may be related to their emotional development, social environment, learning difficulties, family relationships, relationships with their teachers, their peers, as well as the lack of availability of educational aids to enhance their learning process.

“Many of the public education’s problems are, of course, beyond the control of educators, but it is nonetheless particularly vulnerable to public perceptions that its standards, rigor, and quality have slipped. At the heart of this slippage are a watered-down curriculum and the lack of sufficient time spent by students on challenging academic material” (Kirst, 1981).

“Instructional materials are the content or information conveyed within a course. These include the lectures, readings, textbooks, multimedia components, and other resources in a course” (University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2021).

The didactic materials provide the input with which students can experiment and learn during their classes; they can apply this learning in different contexts of daily life. The materials have the possibility of motivating or not the students, therefore, a teacher must know what type of materials to use so that their students achieve interest in their class and acquire knowledge.

The phenomenon of presenting rigid plans, materials, and methodologies in class is a great barrier that does not give way to the existence of diversity in the classroom, causing the population with special and functional educational needs to be relegated and excluded in a certain way in the process of teaching and learning. That is why the paper focuses on adapting and applying varied materials and activities in a diverse classroom considering the functional educational needs of students with autism who are there, applying methodologies that allow the exploration of skills and strengths. Also, its purpose is to solve problems of great magnitude of neurotypical students, which are related to their process of learning English as a foreign language. This is to create an inclusive classroom, where equality, coexistence, and peace are the protagonists of the process.

## **Literature Review**

This part of the document presents theoretical bases that support the development of the paper. In the first instance, the concept of autism is approached from a historical and technical perspective where its pioneer is mentioned and the evolution of the term in the DSM (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders) is alluded to.

Then, the diagnosis is mentioned to recognize a person who lives on the autism spectrum. Finally, some studies that support the hypothesis presented at the beginning of this paper will be mentioned, which cover topics such as the importance of support at home, from teaching staff and their peers creating inclusive spheres for teaching, as well as the relevance of instructional materials and its impact on the teaching of English as a foreign language.

Talking about the origin of the word autism we can refer to Europe, in 1950, Eugen Bleuler published a book called *Dementia Praecox or the Group of Schizophrenias*, where for the first time the term autism was used formally, and he described his patients as follows:

“The most severe schizophrenics, who have no more contact with the outside world, live in a world of their own, they have encased themselves with their desires and wishes (which they consider fulfilled) or occupy themselves with the trials and tribulations of their persecutory ideas; they have cut themselves off as much as possible from any contact with the external world. This detachment from reality, together with the relative and absolute predominance of the inner life, we term autism” (McGlashan, 2011).

In the 1940s, the doctor and child psychiatrist Leo Kanner carried out a study of eleven children with peculiar characteristics and defined them as “*self-absorbed and with severe social, behavioral and communication problems*” (Llave, 2011).

In that same study,

“Kanner called autism “inborn,” suggesting that the syndrome had some biological basis, but he also remarked on the highly educated and aloof fathers and mothers of the eleven children he described” (Herman, 2019).

Up to this point, autism spectrum disorder (ASD) has typically been associated with disturbances in social behaviors, communication, language, and interests. In 1944, Hans Asperger selected the term autism to define it as follows:

“The basic disorder that generates the abnormal personality structure of the children we are concerned with here. The name is derived from the concept of autism in schizophrenia. Autism in this sense refers to a fundamental disturbance of contact that is manifest in an extreme form in schizophrenic patients” (Asperger, 1952, pp. 37-38).

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) is one of the most widely used manuals in psychiatry for the classification and diagnosis of mental illnesses. In the first two editions of the DSM (1 and 2) autism was considered another indication of someone suffering from schizophrenia:

“The DSM-3-R (revised version from 1987) maintained the category of pervasive developmental disorders. Although it deleted the term childhood autism from this group, replacing it with autistic disorder, due to the consideration that the symptoms were still present. The adult stage. The DSM-4 (1994) and the DSM-4-TR (2000) defined autism under three diagnostic categories: alteration in social interaction; disturbance in communication; and restricted, repetitive, and stereotyped patterns of behavior, interests, and activities” (Bonilla & Chaskel, p. 20).

Today, the term can be supported by the DSM-V and the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), who coincide in showing the definition of the concept of autism:

“A complex neurological and developmental disorder that manifests itself in the first years of life and affects how a person acts and interacts with others, communicates, and learns. ASD affects the structure and function of the brain and nervous system. Since it affects development, ASD is considered a developmental disorder. ASD can be present throughout a person's life” (NIH, 2021).

Additionally, the statement made by the NICHD mentions the signs and symptoms of ASD, probable causes, risk factors, and treatments and therapies to help support autism awareness and education in the community to spread ASD throughout the world.

Diagnosing a person with ASD can be complex because there is no specific medical test to diagnose the disability, instead, the behavioral history of the child must be analyzed to have a diagnosis. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2020), there are early signs to detect autism:

- “Avoiding eye contact,
- Having little interest in other children or caretakers,
- Limited display of language (for example, having fewer words than peers or difficulty with use of words for communication), or
- Getting upset by minor changes in routine.” (CDC, 2020)

As the years go by, it is possible that by not having adequate treatment and care, the person does not

reach their maximum potential in the process. Therefore, it is necessary that the child be directed towards the development of the different abilities in all the spheres of his personal life, so that he can build and be part of society.

## **Research on Inclusive Settings, Teaching Strategies, and Instructional Materials**

### *Research on Inclusive Settings*

Denning, C. B., & Moody, A. K. (2013) based this journal article on a descriptive document that aims to highlight different successful educational strategies that can be implemented in inclusive settings within a UDL framework to support students with autism. These strategies include enhancement, engagement, performance, and expression.

The rate of children with ASD has multiplied by more than ten in the last ten decades. This high prevalence imposes a great demand on teachers to attend to basic and specific characteristics so that they can provide support to this population. Many times, teachers may not be adequately prepared to serve this population and therefore children end up receiving general education.

The support that children should receive in the classroom must be designed under the framework of the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) to the needs of students with ASD in inclusive environments. Therefore, it is necessary to recognize the existence of ways to increase the forms of commitment, representation, and expression to support children with ASD based on the UDL.

These pillars will serve for teachers to explore the diverse ways in which students can express their knowledge, as well as learn to understand the perspective of the world that each child has.

### ***Research on Teaching Strategies***

Murray, J. (2015) conducted a review of the literature with the purpose of addressing various social, behavioral, and academic teaching strategies that can be implemented to improve the educational experiences of students with ASD.

The number of students with autism spectrum disorder has increased in recent years. This presents a challenge for teachers since most of them do not have the necessary preparation to take on this type of challenge. In addition to having to add additional responsibilities to meet the social, behavioral, and academic needs of these students without adequate support from institutions and the national or local government.

It is necessary to recognize the different ways to increase the commitment to support children with ASD from the UDL so that they have more expression in the classroom.

The various pillars shown in the UDL will serve for teachers to explore different strategies of application and inclusion, guided towards a diverse classroom.

### ***Research on Instructional Materials***

Adelodun, G. A., & Asiru, A. B. (2015) performed a descriptive study with fifty students from five schools in Ibadan North Local Government Area of Oyo State. The age range for the participants was from 13 to 18. The purpose of this study was to find out how various didactic materials, audio, visual and audiovisual, can be used to improve the performance of high school students in the English Language. There was a relevant relationship between the use of audio, visual, and audiovisual materials, and the performance of high school students in the English language.

Secondary teachers must understand the role of the use of materials as reinforcement elements, transmitters of knowledge, memory stimulators, and time savers. Therefore, the teaching staff is encouraged to make use of the resources listed above while teaching classes to maximize student achievement in the English language. The effect of the materials will make high school students relate well to the foreign language and learn it faster, using their imagination as a tool and making their learning real and permanent. It is important to mention that the educational community and the local government must be advised by people specialized in this field to improve progressively and constantly.

## Methodology

This documentary research paper explains the role of materials in the teaching-learning process in a public and inclusive high school classroom. The intervention involved 40 seventh-grade teenagers from the Silveria Espinosa de Rendón I.E.D School. Thirty-seven of them were neurotypical, and the other three were diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder. The participants were in the range of 12 to 14 years of age and had an A2 level according to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR).

From the participatory observation carried out for two months, it was possible to evidence the lack of materials at a general level in the institution and how this lack slows down the educational processes in the English area. It is important to mention that students with special educational needs do not have a curriculum adapted to their requirements. This, added to the lack of materials, creates a great barrier that prevents achieving a fair and equal education, besides not meeting the requirements to be a high-quality education. This is why collaborative work was started to intervene in this classroom through micro-activities, to establish closer and real contact with the population. These activities were based on the application of various materials focused on reinforcing the topics seen in the English class.

This process was carried out for a month, which allowed an approach and recognition of the strengths of each of the members of the classroom.

After this, together with the teaching staff and psychology, the curriculum of the English area began to be adapted considering the educational needs of the population, as well as the proposal of educational materials and strategies such as the use of visual aids, use of pictures, videos, realia, big flashcards, real objects, keeping sentences short, giving directions and introductions of the topics, working step by step, and avoiding punishment. This implementation process will be executed progressively, starting from small moments of the class, until dominating completely the class implementing the aforementioned strategies.

The proposal to solve the exposed problem will allow the population to develop in an inclusive environment, where everyone has the opportunity to learn the same exploring in different ways to reach the same objective. It is important to understand that there is a multiplicity of points of view and ways of seeing the world, as well as of building knowledge and society. Throughout this study, different theoretical bases were sought to support each of the interventions and applications, as well as the appropriate search for the parameters necessary for the development of the document.

## ***Treatment of People Diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder***

The treatment of autism has been evolving exponentially. This is due to the changes in the criteria that currently are in the DSM-V, where some categories have been removed. Currently, it is limited to psychosocial therapies, medications, and different alternative and complementary treatments. It is important to mention that people who undergo treatment of these characteristics must meet the characteristics specified in the literature review part of this document.

This is so that in the future they have a better quality of life, where they can improve their social skills, since some of them may need help in the educational and work fields. It is worth mentioning that the treatment must be guided and administered by professionals in the health area.

According to DeFilippis & Wagner, 2016, among the existing options regarding the treatment of disability, these are some that have been developed:

**a. “Psychosocial Therapies:** Applied behavior analysis (ABA) is a treatment based on theories of learning and operant conditioning.

It includes specific intervention targets, coupled with positive reinforcement (verbal praise, tokens, or edible rewards), with repetition of learning trials a key component.

**b. Pharmacology:** Medications are primarily used for treating associated symptoms of autism spectrum disorder, as efficacy for use in treating the core symptoms of autism has not been established. Targeted associated symptoms may include, but are not limited to, irritability, aggression, self-injurious behaviors, anxiety, hyperactivity, impulsivity, inattention, and insomnia.

**c. Atypical Antipsychotics:** Risperidone and aripiprazole are approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for the treatment of irritability associated with the diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder.

Risperidone is approved in children at least 5 years of age and aripiprazole is approved for children at least 6 years of age.

**d. Risperidone:** Though no medication is approved for use in treating the core symptoms of autism, there is some evidence that risperidone may be effective in treating the repetitive and restricted patterns of behaviors in children with autism.

**e. Antidepressants:** Antidepressants have been considered for use in autism spectrum disorder due to the observed symptoms of repetitive, ritualistic behaviors and insistence on restricted patterns of routines. Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs), tricyclic antidepressants, and other antidepressants have been studied in patients with autism spectrum disorders.



**f. Complementary Alternative Medicine:** The efficacy of melatonin for sleep disturbances in children and adolescents with autism spectrum disorder has been examined in multiple double-blind, placebo-controlled studies, making it one of the best-studied complementary alternative treatments used in autism spectrum disorder.”

### **Information search strategy**

The information search strategy was divided into three phases. The first stage consisted of the searching of information about the definition of autism, its features, diagnosis, and treatment. Then, a workshop was developed in which the antecedents were worked on through documents that met the characteristics of documentary research, besides making a categorization into three fields of interest for this research (Inclusive Settings, Teaching Strategies, and Instructional Materials).

Finally, when advancing in the construction of the final written document, some gaps and elements that needed theoretical support were found, these were searched for in an immediate and organized way. All the consulted documents are degree works, theses, doctoral dissertations, or journal articles, and these were taken from repositories, scientific journals, and relevant web pages in the field.

### **Discussion**

Throughout the development of this paper, we see how different previous studies and distinct authors support the idea that materials are essential in the teaching-learning process of a foreign language. In the case of this study, we worked in a public-school classroom that had students with special educational needs, so it is of vital importance that the physical space has materials that make the students get involved in this process.

These educational aids are elements that will contribute to their cognitive development, will help them to be more connected with the topic, to use their imagination, to explore different spheres, to learn faster, to enhance their abilities, and to make their learning real and permanent, taking it more beyond the classroom. When the entire population is integrated and an inclusive environment is created, the differences are understood as strengths and not as disadvantages, as teachers we are creating trustworthy, independent, and sensible human beings. Also, we are increasing the levels of confidence, self-esteem, and sense of belonging of each one of the actors in the classroom.

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