



Comparative study on language support classrooms: the case of Andalusia and England

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ABSTRACT

Today the presence of immigrant students in Europe has led to a series of measures and actions to tackle this multicultural reality. In this study we present the functioning and characteristics of language support classrooms and compare Temporary Language Adaptation Classrooms (ATAL, from its initials in Spanish) in Andalusia and the teaching of English as an Additional Language (EAL) in England. Similarly, this study presents the opinion of the students and teachers regarding the materials and activities used in the ATAL and EAL classrooms. Our investigation, which involved 202 students and 23 teachers, employed a descriptive and correlational method with data collected through a series of questionnaires that measure the opinion of students and teachers regarding the materials and activities used in these classrooms. The results obtained indicate the existence of positive and negative aspects of both programmes and show the levels of student-perceived appropriateness of target language materials employed by teachers in the support classrooms. This study concludes with an overview of the current situation and considerations for possible future improvements.

Keywords: The language support classrooms, immigrant students, opinions of students and teachers.

Estudio comparativo de las aulas de inmersión lingüística: el caso de Andalucía e Inglaterra

RESUMEN

Hoy día la presencia de alumnado extranjero en Europa ha originado una serie de medidas y actuaciones para afrontar esta realidad multicultural. En este estudio presentamos el funcionamiento y las características de las aulas de apoyo lingüístico y comparamos las Aulas Temporales de Adaptación Lingüística en Andalucía (ATAL), y la Enseñanza del Inglés como Lengua Añadida (EAL, de sus iniciales en inglés). Asimismo, este estudio presenta la opinión del alumnado y del profesorado respecto a los materiales y actividades que se utilizan en las aulas ATAL y EAL. Nuestra investigación, que incluye 202 estudiantes y 23 docentes, utiliza un método descriptivo y correlacional con datos recogidos a través de varios cuestionarios que miden la opinión del alumnado y del profesorado respecto a los materiales y actividades que se utilizan en dichas aulas. Los resultados obtenidos indican la existencia de aspectos positivos y negativos de ambos programas y evidencian si los materiales más utilizados por los profesores en las aulas de apoyo son aquellos que los alumnos consideran más apropiados o no. Este estudio concluye con una revisión de la situación actual y una serie de consideraciones para posibles en el futuro.

Palabras Clave: Aulas de apoyo lingüístico, estudiantado inmigrante, opiniones de estudiantado y profesorado.

1. Introduction

The continuous growth of the immigrant population in Europe has led to a notable increase in students from other countries who have been schooled without knowing the language of the host country ([European Commission, 2017](#)). Today, the presence of immigrant students in the classroom poses a challenge and creates new situations that must be addressed. In order to help these students and encourage their integration, a set of educational measures and actions have been introduced across Europe. Among the measures aimed at improving and

facilitating both educational and social integration, there are language support classrooms.

While there are several studies on teaching Spanish as a language of instruction and on the attention and integration of immigrant students in Spain and England, there are relatively few studies that deal with the organization and functioning of language support programmes in European contexts. Therefore, the main objective of this study is to discover possible similarities and differences between the Temporary Classrooms of Language Adaptation in Andalusia, and that of Teaching English as an Additional Language in England in specific educational settings.

2. Theoretical framework

In their comprehensive analysis of the National Pupil Database in England, [Strand, Malmberg & Hall \(2015\)](#) present a wide-ranging report on the situation of students of EAL. The first important finding of this document lies in the substantial increase in EAL students between 1997 to 2013 (from 7.6% to 16.2%) and in the fact that percentages of EAL students in schools is highly skewed, with 22% of schools having less than 1% of EAL students and 8.4% with a majority of EAL students (2015: 5). In this study, proficiency in English is clearly identified as a determining factor in academic success, and the most important variables linked to low attainment include recency of international arrival, school mobility and specific first languages (2015:80). In terms of results, only 44% of EAL students at Reception age (4-5 years old) are recorded as having 'a good level of development', in contrast to 54% of students whose first language is English; over time, however, these discrepancies diminish and is virtually eliminated by age 16 (2015: 6-7).

The substantial increase in international students from diverse language backgrounds is by no means exclusive to England. In the case of Andalusia, the regional government recognised the considerable rise in learners with little or no knowledge of Spanish the subsequent need to develop new ways in which to support and integrate these students through Temporary Language Adaptation Classrooms starting between the ages of 8 and 9 years old ([see Consejería, 2007](#)). In the academic year 2016-2017, for example, the number of teachers, often based in a number of schools, increased to a total of 213 in this autonomous region ([Consejería, 2016](#)).

The increased number of EAL and ATAL students, and hence resources required both England and Andalusia is just one issue; another is the way in which individual schools manage classrooms specially intended for this purpose. The importance of this aspect of school and classroom management is discussed in [Prieto's \(2014\)](#) study of characteristics of school ghettos, in which the author highlights the different resources that schools can manage.

[Prieto \(2014\)](#) also highlights the role played by families of immigrant students. Among his conclusions, the author argues that when children from different cultures, countries and social classes coexist, they are better prepared for dealing with intercultural life in the future. In this sense, these students will possess relatively greater strategies, skills, resources and competences than children who attend schools where there is little linguistic, cultural or religious diversity. [Prieto \(2014\)](#) adds that it would be convenient to take into account these new challenges and develop inclusive education programmes not only in those schools which have a high percentage of immigrant students, but in all formal educational settings in general.

From the University of Oviedo, [Busto Rey \(2014\)](#) presents a study on the current situation of a Nursery and Primary School in the province of Leon, where the immigrant population has exceeded the percentage of the native population. Busto Rey makes an exhaustive analysis of the school's documentation and a "limited development and implementation of an Intervention Plan" (2014: 6). Finally, he concludes that, in order to be able to develop effective work in the schools in terms of the integration of immigrant students, the involvement of each one of the members that make up the educational community is needed. In addition, he adds that while the educational community should aim to achieve higher levels of motivation in general, there should be a particular focus on the teachers, since student development lies both of teacher competence and self-perception (2014: 68).

While the importance of these programmes is recognised and, indeed, legislated, evidence on classroom practice is scarce. In one report, however, provided for Guardian Professional Networks in England, [Morrison \(2014\)](#) describes a wide variety of EAL practices, ranging from almost total immersion as is the case of St Joseph's Catholic School, partial immersion in Westborough High School or nearly zero in the Birchfields school where the duration of the language immersion programme is not specified.

Some evidence of variation is also available in Spanish contexts. [Rojas Tejada et al. \(2012\)](#) survey 81 Spanish as a Foreign Language teachers from 132 schools and find two major groups: innovative and traditional teachers. In this study, innovative teachers demonstrated to have higher scores in terms of inclusive beliefs and perceptions of student outcomes and lower rates of burnout. Additionally, innovative teachers see their role not only as teachers of the language but as facilitators into a wider integration process. The study also suggests that other contextual factors are key in the levels of variability, including the attitude of other members of school staff and the way in which management teams shape the programme.

Other studies that deal with schooling immigrant students focus on teacher training components designed specifically for future teachers who will teach these new students. In this sense, [Rodríguez Izquierdo \(2015\)](#) identifies the need for training and states that this is a situation in which many teachers of the 21st century will find themselves. In addition, the author points out that when training European teachers, intercultural education is a secondary activity, and they should obtain the knowledge and skills necessary to meet the needs and situations of today's society, including preparation to interact with people from different cultures, countries, religion or lifestyles. Along this same line, [Nikleva \(2014\)](#) presents a report of two consecutive teaching innovation projects conducted at the University of Granada in Andalusia. The study, conducted with pre-service teachers, highlighted potential difficulties involved in teaching international students and confirmed the need for specific training to support them.

In relation to legislative measures for language support classrooms in Spain, in 2006 the Organic Law of Education ([BOE, 2006](#)) led to the creation of the previously mentioned regional guidelines for Andalusia in [Consejería \(2007\)](#). Since then, the Andalusian Agency of Educational Evaluation of the Ministry of Education ([AGAEVE, 2015](#)) has provided a series of initial results and performance data for 2007 to 2015. In general, there is a very positive assessment by all members of the educational community. In specific terms, some of the most important indicators include the following:

- 9.1% of students receive attention in the ordinary classroom compared to 90.9% who receive it outside of support groups.
- 54% of the students that are attended to in the ordinary classroom work with the same materials as the rest of the classmates, and there are also many who work with different materials.
- 76% of the students disagree or slightly agree with the fact that attention is given in the ordinary classroom, compared to 53% who think it is better to receive the attention within it with a support teacher.
- Families and tutors value the participation of ATAL staff (in 90% of the cases as very positive), as well as the work they do to achieve the integration of the students.

- In 96% of the cases, the ATAL teachers feel accepted by the entire educational community.
- The majority of the ATAL staff consider the maximum duration of the programme to be inadequate; a total of 66% think that once the programme is finished, the knowledge acquired is not enough to access the established curriculum.
- Nearly 68% of the families, 88% of the ATAL teachers and 90% of the tutors believe that the beginning of the students in the programme should be before the third grade of primary school.
- More than 80% of the students affirm that their school carries out activities to conserve elements from the culture of their home country; around 90% of the ATAL staff and the class tutors think that the Programme contributes to the conservation of elements from the foreign students' culture of origin.

Despite this positive picture, there is evidence to suggest that there are also serious challenges. [Arroyo González's \(2010\)](#) study on language adaptation classrooms in the province of Segovia reports that the procedures of schooling immigrant students are generating segregation and tend to develop xenophobic undercurrents. At the same time, he suggests that international students are seen by society as contributing to a worsening in educational quality. The same author provides a study on classrooms and language immersion programmes for foreign students in Spain ([Arroyo González, 2011](#)), specifically for the teaching of Spanish as a vehicular language in the different autonomous communities. As a summary we offer some conclusions of this study:

- Teaching Spanish to achieve the integration of immigrant students in the shortest possible time is the main objective established by each autonomous community;
- The most commonly employed resource for the incorporation processes is the preparation of a psycho-pedagogical report; in some communities it may be the tutor who decides as they do not follow any procedure for incorporation.
- The regulations do not require any specific training for teachers of linguistic immersion programmes (although the Community of Madrid does require its teachers to have training in Spanish as a Foreign Language).
- On many occasions the proposed regulations have been improvised to try to respond to the needs faced by the schools.

As can be observed in this overview of language support classrooms, the recent past and current situation points to a continued increase in international students who require additional help in adapting socially and linguistically to their new school settings. In comparison to other areas of educational research, there are relatively few studies which deal with this emerging and increasingly important phenomenon and the provision of data does not always paint a balanced or unbiased picture. There appear to be many benefits in language support classrooms, however, practices tend to vary from region to region and between individual schools. As described in the following sections, then, this study will attempt to contribute further insights to the current body of knowledge through the comparison of specific contexts in England and Andalusia.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research method

The design of our study was developed under an approach of mixed, qualitative, quantitative and non-experimental research, and a method that was both descriptive and correlational.

3.2. Participants

The sample has been selected according to a type of non-probabilistic sampling of voluntary subjects, given that the choice of them depended on the criterion of the possibility of accessing the students and the teaching staff. In total, 225 participants took part in the study. This number included 202 students (101 from ATAL and 101 from EAL), distributed as follows: 51.49% boys and 48.51% girls. Exactly 50% of the students belonged to one of the following multicultural public secondary schools in the province of Malaga: IES Vega de Mar, Guadalmedina, Alfaguar, Guadaiza, Sierra Almirajara, El Chaparil, Torre Almenara, Salduba, Professor Tomás Hormigo, Huelin and José María Torrijos. The remaining 50% belonged to one of the four public secondary schools in Bradford with a large immigrant population: Belle Vue Girls School, Belle Vue Boys School, Dixon Allerton Academy and Samuel Lister Academy. Regarding the educational level, students were not classified by age, but were grouped by academic level. The academic level distribution was as follows:

- 40.6%: Spanish 1st year CSE / English year 8
- 25.2%: Spanish 2nd year CSE / English year 9
- 21.3%: Spanish 3rd year CSE / English year 10
- 10.3%: Spanish 4th year CSE / English year 11
- 1.5%: Spanish 1st year of baccalaureate / English year 12
- 1%: Spanish 2nd year of baccalaureate / English year 13

The total sample of teachers surveyed was 23; 65.2% were female and the remaining 34.8% male. In the schools where they respectively taught, 69.6% of the staff belonged to one of the four aforementioned schools of Bradford and the remaining 30.4% belonged to one of the schools in Malaga. Regarding the educational level, 78.3% taught from first to fourth of CSE (English levels 8-11), 13% taught in both lower and upper secondary levels, and 8.7% in lower and upper secondary and vocational training levels. A total of 63.6% of teachers had experience ranging from five to twenty-two years of teaching in language immersion classrooms, while the remaining 36.4% had been teaching in such classrooms for less than five years.

3.3. Instruments and procedures

In relation to the research instruments employed, we used participatory observations in both the ordinary and reception classroom along with mixed questionnaires. The questionnaires were addressed to teachers and students who were part of the language support classrooms. As this study includes a comparison between Spain and England, questionnaires were written in Spanish and English. The period of time for questionnaire completion was 10 months (from June 2014 until March 2015). The questionnaires were completed at different times, depending on the time the international students had to attend the support classrooms and always using between fifteen, twenty or twenty-five minutes at the beginning or at the end of the class. For those immigrant students who had already attended the ordinary classroom, they were asked to go to the support

classroom, to avoid distractions and interruptions. To obtain more precise results, we had the collaboration of assistant teachers or fellow students who spoke the same mother tongue, so as to offer support to those students who needed reinforcement to understand the questionnaire when required. Participating ATAL and EAL staff were not given a specific day to complete the questionnaire; instead, they were informed that it should be delivered before the end of the visit at the school. It should be noted that the questionnaires were validated by triangulation of three university experts, who had significant experience in secondary language teaching.

The teacher's questionnaire consisted in a total of 15 items, 6 of which are closed questions (1-4 likert scale – 1 always/very adequate; 2 often/adequate; 3 rarely/less adequate; 4 never/inadequate) and the remaining 9 are open. With the first 6 items we aimed to collect the opinion of the teaching staff regarding the materials and resources that can be used in the reception classrooms. In addition, these items were designed to ascertain the frequency in which they use the different skills, as well as the topics treated in said classrooms. With the open questions we wanted teachers to express in their own words the reason for working with the textbook they use and to establish how the school worked with them. The student's questionnaire consisted of 20 items in total. This study deals only with the first 11 items of closed questions (1-4 likert scale – 1 always/very adequate; 2 often/adequate; 3 rarely/less adequate; 4 never/inadequate), which aimed to collect the students' opinion regarding the materials and activities that could be used in a reception classroom, as well as the opinion about the hours dedicated to oral and written comprehension.

4. Analysis of data and results

As discussed below, the descriptive analysis of responses was applied through frequency tables and bar charts. With the

Table 1.

Student and teacher perceptions on appropriateness of games and songs.

ATALCLASSES				
Games	Students		Teachers	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Very adequate	36	35,6	6	42,85
Adequate	29	28,7	1	7,14
Less adequate	27	26,7	7	50
Inadequate	8	7,9		
No answers	1	1,0		
Songs				
Very adequate	16	15,8	3	42,9
Adequate	23	22,8	4	57,1
Less adequate	35	34,7		
Inadequate	26	25,7		
No answers	1	1,0		
EAL CLASSES				
Games	Students		Teachers	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Very adequate	75	37,1	39	38,6
Adequate	54	26,7	25	24,8
Less adequate	47	23,3	20	19,8
Inadequate	22	10,9	14	13,9
No answers	4	2	3	2,9

distribution of frequencies, we have established the behaviour patterns of each variable. In terms of the use of tables, we have represented all the values of the variable with its frequency in number or percentage of times it appears. The participatory observations have been carried out through observation cards and a content analysis was conducted. Regarding the quantitative analysis, the statistical programme SPSS 22 (Statistical Product and Service Solutions) was used.

With the results obtained among the teachers and the students of ATAL and EAL regarding the materials and activities that took place in the language support classrooms, we compare whether or not the materials most used by the teachers are those that the students considered most appropriate for the teaching and learning of the vehicular language (Spanish / English). Among the most significant opinions we consider the following:

- In terms of the physical teaching and learning materials (textbook and reading books) both ATAL/EAL students consider them to be very adequate and suitable for the language support classrooms; however, teachers in both groups do not use them very frequently.
- With the set of technological tools (digital board, computers and Internet connection), both teachers and students consider their use as very useful.

The students consider these resources to be very appropriate in the teaching and learning process of the target language and the teachers make use of them regularly or frequently.

Results regarding the variables, games and songs are shown in Table 1:

Songs				
Very adequate	24	23,8	11	68,8
Adequate	31	30,7	5	31,2
Less adequate	27	26,7		
Inadequate	18	17,8		
No answers	1	1,0		

As we can see in the first table (ATAL Classrooms), 42,85 percent of the teachers consider the use of games in the language support classrooms to be very appropriate, while only 35.6 percent of the students value it in the same way.

Regarding the use of songs as teaching material, most of the sample of teachers consider it very appropriate (42.9%) and adequate (57.1%). However, 34.7% of students consider it less suitable for teaching and learning Spanish.

In relation to EAL classes, it can be observed how the students and teachers consider the use of games for teaching and learning English as a vehicular language very appropriate. On the other hand, there is a great difference of opinions regarding the use of songs as part of the didactic material. 68.8% of the teachers consider it very adequate, while 26.7 percent of the students consider it to be less appropriate.

Table 2.
Comparative data results from ATAL and EAL classes.

Category	Description	
	ATAL	EAL
Objective	The acquisition of the vehicular language in as little time as possible.	
Type of student	From the 2nd year of primary education until the 4th year of CSE.	Begins in pre-school education until baccalaureate.
Type of centre	Public	
Number of students	No more than 12	Unlimited
The language support classroom	To enter the classroom the initial test is done on the first day of class and the classrooms are itinerant.	The initial test is carried out in the third week and the classrooms are fixed.
Duration of programme attendance	One school year 10hours primary - 15hours secondary	Weeks, months or 1 year, depending on the centre Number of hours are not specified
Faculty	No specific training required.	
Teachers' duties	All those related to direct attention and monitoring of immigrant students with deficiencies in the knowledge of the vehicular language	
Incorporation to the ordinary classroom	When the desired language level has been reached or the assigned time has finalised.	
Attention in the ordinary classroom	Very few centres offer support inside the classroom. They have almost no relationship with the native students.	Receive support inside the classroom (assistant teacher) They are not integrated with the native students.
Relationship with the classmates	They relate with students from all nationalities.	They relate with classmates from the same nationality and on few occasions with native students or students from other countries.
Family-school relationship	Collaborate with the education of their children.	Seldom involved in the scholastic life of their children.

As can be seen, Table 2. represents the approximations and discrepancies of the two ATAL / EAL language support programmes. The categories that share similar measures and actions for the attention of immigrant students are the objectives of the programme, the type of centre (primary / secondary), the teaching staff, the functions of the teaching staff and the incorporation into the ordinary classroom.

On the other hand, we found several differences regarding the type of students, the time spent in the reception classrooms, if teachers are full or part time at the schools, the relationship with classmates, as well as the family-school relationship. In relation to the students who attend ATAL, there is a clear difference: in Andalusia the attention to immigrant students is offered from

the ages of 8-9, which is equivalent to third grade of primary school, while in England they begin in pre-school at 4 or 5 years old. Regarding the length of time, the Ministry of Education for the Andalusian Government establishes the regulations for the period of the ATAL programme attendance (a school year). However, in England, each individual institution determines the duration of programme attendance, which can vary from a week, to months or one year. Regarding the modality of the classroom, in England all the immersion classrooms are fixed, in other words, the school has a full-time EAL teacher due to the high percentage of international students enrolled in school. In addition, they have the help of assistant teachers who support immigrant students in the ordinary classroom in their mother

tongue. In Andalusia, the situation changes substantially: the majority of the schools offer itinerant classrooms; thus, ATAL teachers work at different schools during the week, which means that they spend between two to three days in each school. In this sense, the timetable depends on the students' needs, and they do not have assistant teachers in the ordinary classroom. In those specific sessions in which the ATAL teacher attends to the students in the ordinary classroom, the rest of the immigrant students do not have support classes. Although the schools carry out specific actions to promote communication and integration of immigrant families through the counsellor or the tutor, it can be observed that the immigrant group's involvement and collaboration is much less than that of the native students' relatives. This situation may be due to ignorance of the target language, the socioeconomic level or the instability that this group presents in the country of residence.

5. Discussion

While bearing in mind the non-probabilistic scope and nature of this study, from the results obtained a number of tentative conclusions are possible. Firstly, one of the surprising findings of this study lies in the fact that students tended to demand greater use of the class textbook. The use of textbooks is often associated with more traditional forms of teaching, and in this sense, might run counter to suggestions by researchers such as [Rojas Tejada et al. \(2012\)](#), who point to the preferred attributes of more innovative teachers. Possible explanations behind this preference could lie in the possible sense of security and visible progress that textbooks may offer and in the fact that students can continue to work with textbooks from home.

In terms of the use of ICT (digital board, computers and Internet connection), the students value these tools positively for an improvement in the teaching and learning process of the target language and the staff make use of them whenever they are available. However, one of the problems that we have observed, mainly in ATAL, is that not all the schools offer adequate infrastructure for the integration of ICTs at this educational stage. In the case of EAL classrooms, the opposite is the case, teachers use ICTs on a daily basis; each of the support classrooms has a digital board, Internet connection, and several computers per classroom. Teachers use digital resources to work mainly on vocabulary, grammar, listening comprehension, reading, data research, etc.

In relation to the activities developed in the language support classrooms, we think the students' opinions about the use of the songs is curious. We observe that more than half of the students surveyed (51.5%) think that the songs are not suitable for the reception classrooms, while the teachers think otherwise. This opinion coincides with [Ortega \(2014\)](#), who considers the use of songs, music, games, etc. to be resources that engage students to work under an active, participatory and fun approach that is not only centred on a textbook. Our point of view coincides with the previously mentioned study, in that songs usually create a positive atmosphere in the classroom, and through them teachers can introduce new vocabulary, practice pronunciation, and work on grammar in a natural context. Therefore, we believe that the assessment made by the students may be influenced by the shyness or embarrassment that may develop when participating in a language other than their own.

Once the language support programmes were analysed and the conclusions drawn from the observations both in the reception and ordinary classrooms, it is worth highlighting another series of issues. Firstly, the Andalusian Educational

Administration establishes the duration of the ATAL programme, thus the attendance period is of one school year, 10 hours in primary school and 15 in secondary school. Students can stay in the reception classroom for a maximum of two years when there are often continued absences from class for different reasons. In the case of England, with more independent schools, each school determines its period of permanence, which can last from 2-3 weeks up to 12 or 24 months and the number of hours is often flexible. The students who are in the reception classroom the whole school day, and remain longer than a school year, have a lower level in the common language. This fact is curious as language support classrooms are considered to be the place where immigrant students must learn the vehicular language in order to adapt to the educational system in the shortest time possible.

Regarding the modality of the classroom, in England all the immersion classrooms are fixed; in other words, the school has a full-time EAL teacher due to the high percentage of foreign students enrolled in school. In addition, they have the help of assistant teachers who support immigrant students in the ordinary classroom. In Andalusia the opposite happens; most of the schools have peripatetic teachers, or there are cases where the students themselves move to other schools that have ATAL, which means that these students do not receive Spanish classes as a vehicular language in the school where they are enrolled. On the other hand, in the centres where the ATAL teacher carries out interventions within the ordinary classroom, this leaves the rest of the immigrant students without support classes. In view of this, it is evident that several ATAL teachers or assistant teachers are required per centre to provide support within the ordinary classroom.

As already mentioned in Section 2, in England immigrant students start in the EAL classrooms in the infant education at 4 or 5 years old, while in the ATAL they are offered interventions in primary school, from the age of 8 to 9 years old onwards. It would be convenient, perhaps, to reflect on this and propose the programme to begin at younger ages, at least in the first year of primary education, particularly given the fact that differences in academic performance in students in England is seen to diminish over time ([Strand, Malmberg & Hall, 2015](#)).

We have also been able to observe how teachers find the need to face very different situations and challenges within the same classroom, not only for cultural reasons or due to total or partial ignorance of the vehicular language, but also because they encounter cases of illiteracy in ages where literary skills are assumed to be dominant, or in cases where students enter a school for the first time. This variability would also seem to point to the need for greater levels of training and shared information in terms of good practices ([see Busto Rey, 2014; Nikleva, 2014; Prieto, 2014; Rojas et al., 2012](#)). We understand that it is essential that teachers receive specific training for teaching and learning Spanish / English for immigrants, which is aimed not only at the specific teaching staff (ATAL / EAL), but also for all the teachers that deal with the education of immigrant students. Teachers in general show some frustration and demotivation when it comes to adapting their subject or time to address cultural diversity, as they do not feel prepared to face the challenge of educating foreign students. This lack of training directly affects the students as many classes are not adapted to the student's level or needs.

6. Conclusion

Following completion of the comparative analysis of the Temporary Language Adaptation Classes (ATAL) and the

Teaching of English as an Additional Language (EAL), we suggest a series of proposals to improve the functioning and organization of the language support classes. These proposals would arguably bring us closer to more effective educational decisions, guide improvements for student academic performance, and open the discussion on a more inclusive, intercultural education.

Firstly, we would propose a revision of the regulations in terms of attention given to international students with little or no target language competence. The reception classrooms are essentially exclusive programmes for teaching and learning the vehicular language, carried out in the ordinary classroom and intended for the integration of immigrant students in the school. In practice, however, what predominates is the provision of attention outside the ordinary classroom. At first sight, this may not appear to be negative; but when the reception classroom is used to extract students from class, it has the opposite effect: the non-integration of immigrant students. In this sense, it would be convenient that the legislative frameworks that protect the regulations reflect on the educational approaches that they defend and the measures and actions that are later developed. In the same way, it seems necessary to reconsider the students who attend ATAL. According to current regulations in Spain, this programme is intended for immigrant students with no knowledge of Spanish as a vehicular language. However, this programme should also take into account those Spanish-speaking children who come from immigrant families from South and Central America, who also present difficulties in terms of integration and communication.

Another idea that should be considered is the starting age of ATAL. As we mentioned during the study, ATAL is offered in the second primary cycle (8-9 years). We propose it beginning at younger ages, in the second cycle of early childhood education (5 years). In this way, not only greater communicative competence is achieved, but it could also prevent many of the situations and challenges which teachers have to face, for reasons of ignorance of Spanish as a vehicular language, and also those related to students with literacy problems. In the same way, we think it is necessary for the teaching staff to have more specific training for the teacher that focuses on the language support classrooms, but also the teachers in general. As stated by Madrid (2004), teachers must be prepared to act in multicultural settings, and their intercultural training should not only integrate the term of diversity and culture, but also integrate gender, social class, and religion.

There is no doubt that teachers need to be trained in the educational model demanded by the new society, towards an inclusive and intercultural education. This training, however, must be accompanied by systematic support, sound guidelines and further research into sharable best practices.

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