

STUDENTS' PERCEPTION AS AN INDICATOR OF EDUCATIONAL INCLUSION

(LA PERCEPCIÓN DE LOS ALUMNOS COMO INDICADOR DE INCLUSIÓN EDUCATIVA)

Margarita Rodríguez Gudiño
*Equipo de Orientación Educativa y Psicopedagógica (EOEP)
de Olivenza (Badajoz)*

Cristina Jenaro Río
Universidad de Salamanca

Raimundo Castaño Calle
Universidad Pontificia de Salamanca

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ABSTRACT

The main goal of this study was to analyze the relationship between pupils' perception of their schools as inclusive schools and their sociometric status. A sample of 881 students belonging to 43 primary classrooms (6 to 12 years old) of different educational levels (N = 881), of which 98 pupils presented specific educational support needs (11.12%). All of them enrolled in ordinary schools in the Extremadura region (Spain). A questionnaire, based on the peer nomination method and attributes association, was used to analyze sociometric status. The Questionnaire on the Children's Point of View, taken from the Index for Inclusion (Booth, Ainscow & Kingston, 2006), was used to assess the pupils' perception of their schools. The study showed that the perception that pupils have of their schools, whether they have specific needs for educational support or not, is significantly associated with their sociometric status, and more specifically, the rejection they receive in their classrooms from their peers. The results also indicated that students with specific educational needs feel more supported by teachers than by their peers. This leads us to reflect on whether the organizational measures adopted by schools affect their inclusion. Hence, there is a need to periodically assess grouping strategies and pupils' perception of their schools.

KEY WORDS

Student evaluation, peer acceptance, sociometric techniques, inclusion, special needs students, elementary schools

RESUMEN

El principal objetivo de este estudio ha sido analizar la relación entre la percepción de los alumnos de sus centros educativos, en cuanto a centros inclusivos, y el estatus sociométrico de los mismos. Para ello se contó con una muestra de 881 alumnos pertenecientes a 43 aulas de primaria (de 6 a 12 años) de diferentes niveles educativos, entre los cuales se encontraban 98 alumnos con necesidades específicas de apoyo educativo (11,12%), todos ellos escolarizados en centros educativos ordinarios de la región de Extremadura (España). Para analizar el estatus sociométrico se utilizó un cuestionario basado en el método de nominación de iguales y la asociación de atributos. Para valorar la percepción de los alumnos de sus centros educativos se utilizó el *Cuestionario sobre el Punto de Vista de los Niños* extraído del *Index for Inclusion* (Booth, Ainscow y Kingston, 2006). El estudio mostró que la percepción que tienen los alumnos de sus centros educativos, tanto si éstos tienen necesidades específicas de apoyo educativo como si no, está significativamente asociada a su estatus sociométrico, y más concretamente, al rechazo que reciben en sus clases por parte de sus iguales. También indicó que los estudiantes con necesidades específicas de apoyo educativo se ven más apoyados por los profesores que por sus compañeros. Todo ello nos lleva a reflexionar sobre si las medidas organizativas que adoptan las escuelas para dar respuesta a las necesidades educativas puedan afectar a su inclusión. De ahí, la necesidad de evaluar periódicamente las estrategias de agrupamiento y la percepción de los alumnos de sus centros educativos.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Percepción de los alumnos, aceptación de iguales, técnicas sociométricas, inclusión, estudiantes con necesidades educativas especiales, primaria

INTRODUCTION

Educational inclusion has been considered the best practice in education for many years (Stites, Rakes, Noggle & Sha, 2018). This goes beyond merely siting students with special educational needs in ordinary classrooms. It also requires removing barriers to participation (Schwab, 2018). Inclusion can be understood as a methodological and organizational issue that affects different levels within the educational system to achieve social educational objectives, such as social justice and participation of all its actors (Haug, 2017). Key issues for inclusive education are the presence, emplacement, participation and achievements of all students (Ainscow, 2016). Here, when we talk about all students, we are referring both to those who do not have specific needs and to those who have those needs. It should be remembered that

according to the Organic Law of Education (LOE, 2/2006, of May 3), the term of Specific Educational Support Needs (SESN) includes students with high abilities, with specific learning difficulties (e.g. dyslexia, dyscalculia) or that require compensatory measures usually due to social circumstances (e.g. migrants with late incorporation into the education system), and students with special education needs (SEN). These educational needs are related to their own physical, psychic, cognitive, sensory or behavioral conditions. Students with intellectual disabilities or autism spectrum disorder (ASD) are included in this term.

Many research shows that an inclusive school is characterized by its ability to work as a cohesive team (Ainscow, 2016). However, the success of inclusive education does not lie in sending students with special needs to mainstream schools and waiting for miracles to happen. It relies heavily on the collaboration of parents and teachers (Adams, Harris & Jones, 2016). The teacher must also ensure the facilitation of daily learning experiences for all students. Consequently, educational environments should be designed according to the educational needs of students to maximize their participation with peers in academic and non-academic activities. This contrasts with data showing that students with SEN attending ordinary schools are placed in special units where they can spend up to more than 20% time (Ramberg & Watkins, 2020). The gap between the theory and practice of inclusion is also highlighted in recent studies (Moliner, Arnaiz & Sanahuja, 2020).

Social relationships and interactions play a relevant role in the healthy development of the child and their socialization (Perolli-Shehu, 2019), and the peer group has an exceptional importance in this issue (Krampač & Kolak, 2018) because it is created from a formal group of peers through the class-group (Krampač & Kolak, 2018). Therefore, it is important to analyze how ordinary students in general, and students with special educational needs in particular perceive their acceptance by their peers with and without educational needs, and their perception of belonging to the ordinary learning environment. Acceptance and belonging are closely associated concepts that impact and influence each other as several studies suggest (Rose, Barahona & Muro, 2017; Rose & Shevlin, 2017).

According to the approaches of Crouch et al. (Crouch, Keys & McMahon, 2014), the perception of acceptance that pupils with special educational needs or disabilities have is related to their experiences of positive interactions with others. Thus,

where they feel respected and treated in a similar way as their peers they perceive acceptance by the group and belonging to that environment. Here, it has been shown that students who do not receive support outside their classroom are more accepted than those students who leave the classroom to receive special supports (Rose et al., 2017). Some research shows that the participation and social interaction of children with and without SEN is conditioned by the personal characteristics of the child and the educational organization that schools take on (Rose et al, 2017; Wendelborg & Tøssebro, 2011). These studies suggest that it is not SEN itself that generates differences, but the type of educational support that they have received and how much they participate in the classroom with their peers (Wendelborg & Tøssebro, 2011). It should also be noted that the most severe SENs are associated with more hours outside the classroom (Wendelborg & Tøssebro, 2011). This is relevant because the child's social status implies the phenomenon of acceptance or rejection by his or her peer group. Thus, students who do not feel appreciated or feel rejected by others become frustrated, bored and stop participating in learning activities (Prince & Hadwin, 2013).

Perceptual tradition and cognitive social theory recognize the importance of perceptions in understanding and predicting individual behavior (Purkey & Novak, 2016). Perceptions relate to the way we think about other and ourselves. These perceptions also have the ability to guide our behavior and it is known that we tend to react to our own experiences depending on how we perceive them. Previous studies showed that pupils' perceptions are a reflection and product of the school's climate and differ according to the characteristics and experiences of each student (Ng & Yuen, 2011). However, some authors (Schwab, Sharma & Hoffmann, 2019) point out that the perceptions of pupils with and without disabilities have been hardly analyzed. However, we do have a few exceptions. For instance, the relationship between the perception of the school environment and academic outcomes and between the perception of school culture, inclusion and educational practices among students with and without disabilities (Shogren, Gross, Forber-Pratt, Francis, Satter, Blue-Banning & Hill, 2015) has been explored. In addition, the perception that pupils have of inclusive practices, such as differentiation and personalization (Lindner, Alnahdi, Wahl & Schwab, 2019) and the perception of peers without disabilities towards their peers with disabilities in school and university contexts (Akin & Huang, 2019), has been studied. But, it is clear that these studies are not enough to draw conclusions about this issue.

Thus, this research, carried out with a large sample of primary education pupils, explores the perception of pupils in their schools and their relationship with the acceptance and rejection they receive from their peers. As done in previous studies (Rose et al., 2017), we analyze the sociometric status of students in ordinary schools who receive specific educational support outside the classroom for various reasons. To this we add the analysis pupils' perceptions about their schools as a new question of investigation. This gives us valuable information from pupils who are considered as privileged informants of classroom interactions and structure (Wallace, Kelcey & Ruzek, 2016). The identification of the characteristics and elements associated to the different experiences and perceptions of pupils in relation to their emplacement at school should be studied at national and international levels (Ramberg & Watkins, 2020).

Therefore, our objectives were: (1) To analyze the sociometric status of students with and without specific educational support needs. (2) Analyze the perception that students with different sociometric status have of their schools. (3) Analyze differences and similarities depending on whether students are part of the group of students with specific educational support needs or not. In this way, we hope to find:

(1) More acceptance among students without SESN and more rejection among students with SESN.

(2) Higher levels of satisfaction with the school among children who are accepted (popular or average).

(3) Significantly lower levels of satisfaction with their school among pupils who do not experience such acceptance or who are rejected (neglected or rejected).

(4) These differences will be maintained for both groups of pupils; pupils with specific educational support needs and pupils without them.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Participants

The sample was 881 primary students, aged between 6 and 12 years old, all from different educational levels and enrolled in schools in different areas. The sample represents 20 ordinary schools, of which 82.4% were public schools and 17.6% were

private schools. According to their geographical location, 70% were in the capital city of their region, 25% were in urban areas, and 5% were in rural areas.

The criteria for the inclusion in this research were the acceptance of schools to participate, the authorization and informed consent of their parents, and the voluntary participation of their teachers-tutors and students. Table 1 shows the distribution of the 881 students by level. A total of 98 students (11.12%) had specific educational support needs (SESN). All of these students attend ordinary schools although they receive support outside the classroom as a measure of attention to diversity.

Among students with SESN, students with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder predominated (51%), followed by intellectual disability (16.3%), learning difficulties, borderline intelligence and significant curricular gap (15.3%), autism spectrum disorder (6.1%), language disorder (4%), severe conduct disorder (2%), high ability (2%), physical disability (1%), hearing impairment (1%), and visual impairment (1%). As can be appreciated, this study includes different groups of SESN because the group of students with SESN who attend primary school is equally heterogeneous.

Table 1
Distribution of pupils by levels and percentages of specific educational support needs (SESN)

Primary	N	SESN	%
First year	36	4	11.11
Second year	141	16	11.35
Third year	205	20	9.76
Fourth year	218	22	10.09
Fifth year	156	19	12.18
Sixth year	125	17	13.60
Total	881	98	11.12

Procedure

The data was collected from January to June 2019 from the 20 participating schools. The sociometric questionnaires were applied to the students in their classrooms by their tutors in addition to the Questionnaire on the Point of View of children (original by Booth, Ainscow & Kingston, 2006, translation and adaptation into Spanish by González-Gil, Gómez-Vela & Jenaro, 2007). Instructions and training were provided to ensure proper data collection and confidentiality of information. The research was approved with the Regional Government's Department of Education.

Instruments

A sociometric questionnaire was developed in which the peer nomination method was combined with association of attributes method based on previous investigations (Martín, Muñoz de Bustillo & Pérez, 2011). The sociometric questionnaire was designed with a single criterion (preference), two dimensions (positive and negative), and two contexts (class and yard) (Nepi, Fioravanti, Nannini & Peru, 2015). The procedure with maximum three choices was employed because there is evidence that this criterion increases accuracy compared to those based on five elections (Baydik & Bakkaloglu, 2009; García-Bacete, 2006).

The attribute association method provides information about how classmates perceive behavior. We followed the model of Díaz-Aguado (2006) with the question-stimulus: "Who is the boy or girl in your classroom who stands out for...". The following attributes were used as stimuli: "Having many friends"; "Having few friends"; "Participates in all activities"; "Participates in few activities"; "Knows a lot"; "Knows little"; "Needs a lot of help from teachers"; "Needs little help from teachers"; "Behaving like a mature person"; "Behaving like a younger child"; "The one who annoys others the most"; "The one who least annoys others." The analyses lead us to classify the students according to their sociometric status into four sociometric types: Rejected, Neglected, Average and Popular. The assignment of the students to each sociometric type was made taking the proposal of DeRosier & Thomas (2003) as a reference. Thus, the four groups were defined as follows: (1) Populars are those students who have high scores in their Choice status, and low or medium scores in their Rejection status. (2) Averages are the students who obtain average scores in Choice, and low or average in Rejection. (3) The Neglected are the students who get low rating in Choice, and low rating in Rejection. (4) The Rejected are those students who obtain low or average rating in Choice, and high rating in Rejection.

In addition, we used the Children's Point of View Questionnaire taken from the Index for Inclusion, Developing Play, Learning and Participation in Early Years and Childcare (Booth, Ainscow & Kingston, 2006). Specifically, Questionnaire Three, which consists of 13 items to which students respond with three categories of answers: "Always", "Sometimes", "Never". These categories were added as no response format is provided in the original questionnaire. In this way we have applied the three-point response system used in the remaining questionnaires included in the Index and

intended for older children or other informants (parents, teachers, etc.). By answering these items we try to know what children think about their schools. They are asked to respond with sincerity by expressing their opinions, and not thinking about what might please their parents or teachers (González-Gil, Gómez-Vela & Jenaro, 2007). Higher scores denote greater satisfaction with the school. The overall reliability obtained in this instrument was $\text{Alpha} = 0,68$ while reliability was $\text{alpha}=0.76$ for the SESN group and $\text{alpha}=0.67$ for the group without SESN. Taking into account the diversity of content covered by the questionnaire, it can be considered that the levels of reliability were acceptable for both groups.

Design and Analysis

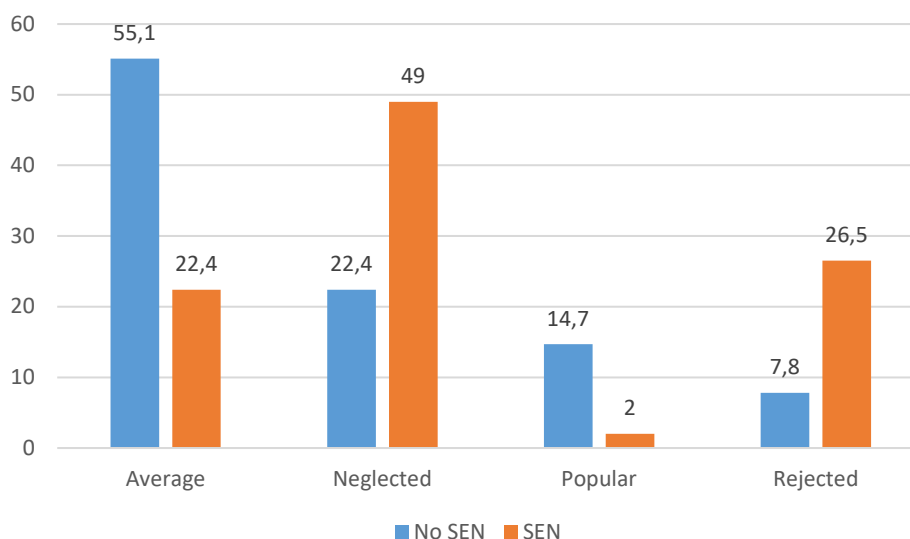
The present research is exploratory, descriptive-cross-sectional, and with ex post facto measures. Non-parametric statistics such as the Chi-square test and the analysis of corrected typified residues (CR) have been applied to respond to the objectives. These residuals are normally distributed. Thus, when they have a value greater than 1.96 they indicate more cases than there should be if the variables studied were independent, while residuals smaller than -1.96 indicate fewer cases than would be expected under the condition of independence. For the contrast of hypotheses and to analyze the significance of the differences, analysis of variance (Anova).has been utilized.

RESULTS

Presence or absence of SESN and sociometric status

With regard to the first goal, we analyzed the percentage of students in each of the sociometric types, and whether they present SESN or not. The analysis of the association revealed a significant association between both variables (Chi square= 83.779, $fd=3$, $p<0.001$). The analysis of the corrected residues showed it is much more likely that students without SESN receive sociometric assessment of Average (RC=6.1) or Popular (3.5) and less likely of Rejected (RC=-5.9) or Neglected (RC=-5.7). In contrast, the analysis showed it is much less likely for students with SESN to receive sociometric assessment of Average (RC=-6.1) or Popular (RC=-3.5), while it is much more likely to be Rejected (RC=5.9), or Neglected (RC=5.7). Figure 1 shows the percentages obtained in each case. Almost 50% of students with specific educational support needs belong to the neglected group. On the other hand, more than 55% of the students without such needs belong to the average group.

Figure 1
Percentage of students categorized as average, neglected, popular and rejected ungrouped by presence or absence of specific educational support needs



Sociometric type and perception of the school

Regarding objective 2, we analyzed the possible existence of differences in the items of the questionnaire as well as in the questionnaire considered globally on the total sample of students. Table 2 shows the existence of significant differences in items 2, 3, 6, 8 and total. Post hoc (Duncan) analyses revealed that for items 2, 3 and 8, rejected students score significantly lower than other peers. For item 5, rejected students score significantly lower than average students and for item 6, popular students score significantly higher than the other groups.

The results in terms of students' satisfaction with their schools do not seem to be mediated either by their achievements (item 11) or by the perception that families have of schools (item 13).

Table 2
Descriptive statistics and significance of differences (Anova) according to sociometric types

	N	Means	SD	SE	F	Sig.
it1_ I like coming to school					1,704	0,165
Average	443	2,47	0,58	0,03		
Neglected	210	2,57	0,60	0,04		
Popular	115	2,50	0,58	0,05		

	Rejected	87	2,54	0,55	0,06		
it2_ <i>I like to play with my friends</i>						8,02	0,000
	Average	444	2,88	0,34	0,02		
	Neglected	210	2,81	0,43	0,03		
	Popular	116	2,93	0,25	0,02		
	Rejected	87	2,70	0,55	0,06		
it3_ <i>My friends like to play with me</i>						7,94	0,000
	Average	437	2,70	0,49	0,02		
	Neglected	205	2,56	0,56	0,04		
	Popular	114	2,66	0,55	0,05		
	Rejected	86	2,43	0,66	0,07		
it4_ <i>My teachers like to listen to me</i>						1,165	0,322
	Average	439	2,58	0,56	0,03		
	Neglected	205	2,53	0,59	0,04		
	Popular	113	2,55	0,60	0,06		
	Rejected	86	2,45	0,63	0,07		
it5_ <i>My teachers like to help me</i>						1,962	0,118
	Average	428	2,76	0,47	0,02		
	Neglected	199	2,70	0,56	0,04		
	Popular	112	2,70	0,53	0,05		
	Rejected	78	2,62	0,59	0,07		
it6_ <i>I like to help teachers</i>						2,783	0,040
	Average	443	2,53	0,65	0,03		
	Neglected	203	2,50	0,66	0,05		
	Popular	116	2,68	0,49	0,05		
	Rejected	85	2,45	0,70	0,08		
it7_ <i>Some children insult other</i>						0,381	0,767
	Average	441	2,15	0,49	0,02		
	Neglected	209	2,16	0,63	0,04		
	Popular	114	2,10	0,55	0,05		
	Rejected	87	2,16	0,59	0,06		
it8_ <i>Sometimes the kids are not very kind to me</i>						4,565	0,004
	Average	429	2,56	0,52	0,03		
	Neglected	202	2,47	0,53	0,04		
	Popular	111	2,50	0,55	0,05		
	Rejected	85	2,33	0,64	0,07		
it9_ <i>When I am sad I feel an adult helps me</i>						0,447	0,720
	Average	442	2,62	1,58	0,08		
	Neglected	207	2,50	0,71	0,05		
	Popular	114	2,57	0,61	0,06		
	Rejected	86	2,52	0,68	0,07		
it10_ <i>When the children fight the teacher knows how to solve it</i>						0,474	0,701
	Average	444	2,76	0,50	0,02		
	Neglected	207	2,73	0,52	0,04		
	Popular	112	2,70	0,53	0,05		
	Rejected	84	2,76	0,51	0,06		
it11_ <i>I am satisfied with my achievements</i>						1,385	0,246
	Average	440	2,77	0,47	0,02		

	Neglected	207	2,73	0,53	0,04		
	Popular	112	2,69	0,60	0,06		
	Rejected	86	2,66	0,64	0,07		
it12_ My teachers like me to tell what I do at home						0,222	0,881
	Average	437	2,20	0,71	0,03		
	Neglected	206	2,23	0,75	0,05		
	Popular	111	2,22	0,72	0,07		
	Rejected	85	2,15	0,79	0,09		
it13_ My family thinks this is a good school						1,661	0,174
	Average	432	2,88	0,36	0,02		
	Neglected	202	2,87	0,38	0,03		
	Popular	111	2,95	0,23	0,02		
	Rejected	83	2,84	0,40	0,04		
Total						2,65	0,048
	Average	447	31,81	3,57	0,17		
	Neglected	212	31,14	4,26	0,29		
	Popular	116	31,77	3,41	0,32		
	Rejected	87	30,89	3,40	0,36		

Perception of the school and sociometric status of students without SESN

With regard to Objective 3, the same analyses have been carried out, breaking down whether or not they have SESN. Table 3 summarizes the results obtained for the items where significant differences were found among students who do not present SESN. Post hoc (Duncan) analyses revealed that for items 2, 3 and 8, rejected students score significantly lower than other peers. For item 5, rejected students score significantly lower than average students and for item 6, rejected students score significantly lower than average and popular students.

Table 3
Descriptive statistics and significance of differences (Anova) depending on sociometric types in students without SESN

No SESN	N	M	SD	SE	F	Sig.
it2_ I like to play with my friends					7,02	0,000
	Average	425	2,89	0,32	0,02	
	Neglected	172	2,84	0,41	0,03	
	Popular	115	2,93	0,26	0,02	
	Rejected	61	2,69	0,56	0,07	
it3_ My Friends like to play with me					8,08	0,000
	Average	418	2,71	0,48	0,02	
	Neglected	169	2,54	0,57	0,04	
	Popular	113	2,66	0,55	0,05	
	Rejected	61	2,41	0,67	0,09	
it5_ My teachers like to help me					3,07	0,027
	Average	411	2,76	0,46	0,02	

	Neglected	164	2,68	0,57	0,04		
	Popular	111	2,69	0,54	0,05		
	Rejected	53	2,57	0,64	0,09		
it6_ I like to help my teachers						2,94	0,033
	Average	425	2,53	0,64	0,03		
	Neglected	167	2,47	0,67	0,05		
	Popular	115	2,68	0,49	0,05		
	Rejected	59	2,44	0,73	0,09		
it8_ Sometimes the kids are not very kind to me						5,22	0,001
	Average	410	2,56	0,53	0,03		
	Neglected	165	2,45	0,53	0,04		
	Popular	110	2,49	0,55	0,05		
	Rejected	61	2,30	0,67	0,09		
Total						3,10	0,026
	Average	428	31,89	3,50	0,17		
	Neglected	174	31,07	4,30	0,33		
	Popular	115	31,77	3,42	0,32		
	Rejected	61	30,80	3,24	0,42		

Perception of the school by the students with SESN

The analyses carried out with the specific educational support needs students did not reveal statistically significant differences between the sociometric types. It is important to note that a limitation found in relation to the statistical analyses performed is the sample size of some of the sociometric types. Therefore, the Popular sociometric type (N=1) had to be eliminated from the analyses because it was not representative.

Differences in the perception of the school between students with and without SESN

Finally, the analyses carried out comparing each sociometric group separately according to the presence or absence of SESN showed that there were no significant differences in the average group in the assessment of the school, either globally or in any of the items. Analyses with the neglected group revealed significant differences between students with or without SESN in items 4 “*My teachers likes to listen to me*”, and 12 “*My teachers likes me to tell them what I do at home*” and students with SESN scored significantly higher. Analyses with the rejected group also did not reveal significant differences. Finally, it was not possible to carry out analyses with the Popular group due to the absence of students with SESN who were included in this category.

Discussion

The present study offers evidence that confirms lower acceptance by students of peers with specific educational needs. These results are in line with those obtained from previous studies showing how students with disabilities are less accepted than their peers (Baydik & Bakkaloglu 2009; Héctor & Olivarez, 1995; Nepi et al., 2015). Thus, our first hypothesis is confirmed in that students with SESN are predominantly categorized as Rejected or Neglected, while students who do not present SESN are predominantly categorized as Popular or Average. It should be noted that when we refer to Rejected we are referring to being "sociometrically rejected". That is, students who obtain a rejection status above the class-group average and an election status below that average are considered rejected (García-Bacete, 2006; Pijl, Frostad & Flem, 2008). In addition, through the peer nomination technique based on double analysis (Like to Work and Like to Play), only children chosen as preferred partners are considered to have a good social position (Nepi et al., 2015). In any case, the present findings justify investigating the factors that could be at the basis of this disadvantage in terms of social preference.

In this regard, research interest is currently focused on not only analyzing the acceptance or rejection towards students with SESN, but also the factors that lead to such acceptance or rejection by peers (Perolli-Shehu, 2019). Previous studies have looked at personal factors such as language skills (Van der Wilt, Van der Veen, Van Kruistum & Van Oers, 2020), social and emotional competence (Blandon, Calkins, Grimm, Keane & O'Brien, 2010) and the presence of disability (Baydik & Bakkaloglu 2009; Kwon, Hong & Jeon, 2017). They have also highlighted the weight of peer attitudes and the impact of the context according to the presence or not of a special education unit in schools (Vignes, Godeau, Sentenac, Coley, Navarro, Grandjean & Arnaud, 2009), clustering strategies (De Vroey, Struyf & Petry, 2016) and organizational strategies adopted by schools to meet the educational needs of students with SESN through specialized support outside the classroom (Rose et al., 2017; Wendelborg & Tøssebro, 2011).

These findings, obtained with a large and diverse group of students with educational needs, offer support to those who warn that the response to attention to diversity consisting of offering support outside the classroom to meet the specific needs of students may decrease their participation in activities where their peers are involved

(Rose et al., 2017; Wendelborg & Tøssebro, 2011). This reduction in participation and therefore in contact could explain the lower preference towards these students. The relationships of companionship, affection and friendship are built on presence and participation and a reduction of these can, in turn, have negative consequences on relationships.

In addition, this study shows that students who feel more accepted by their peers, specifically, those categorized sociometrically as Average and Popular, experience greater satisfaction with the school. The opposite is true for those categorized as Neglected and Rejected who show less satisfaction with their schools. This result is especially relevant, because they are primary school students and the data have been obtained with two different instruments and techniques, which increases confidence in the present results.

The results show that students who receive more rejection enjoy playing with their friends less (item 2), and perceive that their friends like playing with them less (item 3). In addition, they perceive that sometimes their peers are not kind to them (item 8). On the other hand, no differences have been found in terms of the perception students have about the support they receive from their teachers (items 4, 9, 10, 12) and the sociometric types. However, Rejected students show less interest in helping their teachers, while Popular students show significantly higher interest. In addition to this, when the situation of students without SEN and classified as Rejected is analyzed separately, they also agree in perceiving that their teachers like to help them less (item 5). These results have similarities with a study carried out in the United Kingdom in which, based on questions raised in the Index for Inclusion, students with and without SEN were asked to assess their agreement towards statements such as: *"I feel happy in this school"*, or *"Teachers help all students and not just the most capable"*. Analyses revealed that students with SEN offered lower ratings (Hodson et al., 2005). Similarly, a study carried out in the United Arab Emirates in which students with and without SEN were asked about the inclusion of peers with disabilities, the initial levels of acceptance of these students is higher as is the satisfaction of these students with the school. But this trend is reversed in more advanced levels (Alborno & Gaad, 2014). In the present study, primary school students experience less acceptance by their peers and less support from their teachers. It may be revealing the lack of training of teachers to apply different teaching strategies that meet the educational needs of students with different

personal and social conditions (Amr, Al-Natour, Al-Abdallat & Alkhamra, 2016; Odongo & Davidson, 2016), not necessarily labeled as SESN.

While we expected the findings to be maintained for both students with specific educational support needs and those without, the results partially support this prediction. On the one hand, we have found that the assessments of the school by students with SESN are more similar. However, factors such as the almost absence of popular students in this group as well as the smaller sample size, may help to explain these results. On the other hand, the presence of educational needs acts as a homogenizing factor of perceptions. Having highlighted that, when we compare the differences between sociometric groups and the presence or absence of SESN, neglected students with SESN perceive that they receive significantly more attention and support from their teachers. These differences could be reflecting the specific attention these students receive from the support teacher. Here, the clustering strategies adopted by schools as specialized support outside the classroom could be entrenching the duality of general versus special education, rather than enhancing inclusion. That is, the specialized support provided makes the responsibility for teaching students with SESN fall on special education teachers (Amr et al., 2016; Avila, 2017), which, in turn, makes the general teacher feel responsible for teaching only a portion of students. This is important because having support resources or potential resources for inclusion does not guarantee inclusive outcomes (Saloviita, 2020). Finally, it should be noted that in the present study, only one student with SESN obtained a sociometric assessment of Popular, which can be considered as another indicator of the low level of acceptance of these students. We can draw some conclusions from the present study to state that:

1. Students without SESN receive more choices from their peers in the class-group, and therefore, their sociometric status is predominantly Average or Popular while students with SESN get more rejection and their sociometric status is predominantly Neglected or Rejected.
2. Students differ significantly in the perception they have of their schools. This perception is significantly affected by the choices and rejections they receive from their peers in the class-group.
3. Students accepted by their peers (popular or average) show higher levels of satisfaction with their school, while those who do not experience such acceptance (neglected or rejected) show less satisfaction with their school.

Implications

On a practical level, the results of this study support the importance of giving students a voice as a way to promote meaningful processes of inclusion. Hence, the importance of including the perception of students of their schools as an indicator of educational inclusion and the need for periodic evaluation of inclusion as an indicator of educational quality.

Again it becomes clear how certain organisational decisions taken by schools influence and affect the acceptance of students with disabilities by their peers of typical development. Regardless, it is widely known that examples of good practices and educational commitment to inclusion by teachers offer their fruits even in cases of more significant SEN in which the implementation of activities that promote play, learning and participation are key to obtaining significant changes (Scholes, Lunn Brownlee, Walker, Johansson , Lawson & Mascadri, 2017) for all students. These results also highlight the importance of training future teachers in the implementation of inclusive strategies in the classroom to help reduce the gap between theory and practice (Moliner et al., 2020). The implementation of training strategies, based on integrated design to acquire more skills in inclusive pedagogy has been shown to offer better results (Lancaster & Bain, 2019).

Limitations

This study analyzes the perceptions of primary school students. Despite the large sample, its selection and origin, the results cannot be generalized to Spanish students of other educational levels (Secondary Education, Higher Education and University). The relatively limited number of students with SESN has prevented a more detailed analysis of possible differences depending on the personal or social conditions of the students. Future research should confirm whether the results obtained differ or are maintained at other educational levels, for the different personal conditions of the students and for different sociometric statuses. On the other hand, the study is based on a quantitative methodology and the use of questionnaires. The use of other strategies to collect data, such as direct observation, could give more detailed information about the behaviors and interactions between all pupils. Finally, subsequent work could investigate the personal conditions of students associated with greater or lesser

acceptance, such as their social skills, in order to implement educational measures that guarantee full equality of opportunities and participation.

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PERFIL ACADÉMICO Y PROFESIONAL DE LOS AUTORES

Margarita Rodríguez Gudiño. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3941-242X>

Degree in Psychology from the UNED, a Master's Degree in Integration of People with Disabilities: Habilitation and Rehabilitation. INICO, University of Salamanca and Master in Communication Disorders: Neuroscience of Hearing and Language, University of Salamanca. She is a secondary school teacher, specializing in psychology and pedagogy, and a counselor in the Educational and Psychopedagogical Guidance Team (EOEP) of Olivenza (Badajoz). E-mail: margarigudi@hotmail.com

Cristina Jenaro Río. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2060-1658>

University professor since 2016, in the department of personality, psychological assessment and treatment of the faculty of psychology, University of Salamanca. She is a researcher at INICO, University Institute of Community Integration and member of the Consolidated Research Unit (UIC) and recognized by the Junta de Castilla y León on September 22, 2015. She is also a member of the research team NEUR-09 Autism and Neurodevelopmental Disorders, Infoautism, of the IBSAL. Her main lines of research are related to disability, inclusion, health, quality of life, attitudes and transition to adulthood. E-mail: crisje@usal.es

Raimundo Castaño Calle. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1586-6491>

Full professor since 2018 at the Faculty of Education, Universidad Pontificia de Salamanca. He has a Master's degree in Physical-Sports Activity and Social Integration and is the Current vice dean of teaching staff and degrees of that faculty. Her is a member of the EGIIOFYD research team, Teaching, Management, Intervention, Inclusion and Orientation of Physical Activity and

Sport. He is also a member of the Scientific Reviewers Committee of Comunicar Journal (Indexed in JCR (Q1); SCOPUS (Q1); Google Scholar (1st top 100)). Among his lines of research are the attention to diversity and inclusive education, students with Specific Educational Support Needs or Inclusion in the framework of physical activity and sport. Email: rcastanoca@upsa.es

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