

Anthology no 2: Comparative Classroom Studies towards Inclusion

Theory and Methodology in International Comparative Classroom Studies

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Methodology in the Study of a Child with a Cochlea Implant within the Inclusive Classroom

Zora Jachova, Natasa Angeloska-Galevska and Aleksandra Karovska

Introduction – the context of development towards inclusive education

This is an original study, the first one of its kind in the Republic of Macedonia. We believe that the study provides valuable findings about administration of the process of inclusion of children with cochlea implant in regular schools. The study enables a detailed elaboration on the following topics in our joint comparative study: The pupil – assessment – organization of the class and teaching methods – and communication⁶⁹. Because this is action research, it has resulted in the development of an action plan, or, as we have called it – strategies for working with children with cochlea implants in the inclusive school. These working strategies are not only recommended to the teachers that work with our examinee, but they are also available to the general population. Because of the combination of research methods – qualitative and quantitative or mixed methods – and because of the use of triangulation procedures, we can say that these strategies (action plans) may be used by every interested teacher working with children with cochlea implants.

69. For more information about “the joint frames and freedom of content and methodology ...” see WB 04/06 and Johnsen, 2014.

Research design

During the process of selecting a research focus area, we decided on a context-related issue for the purpose of gathering information that describes the situation; the difficulties that pupils with cochlea implants face in a certain context in the Republic of Macedonia.

The objective of our research project thus concerns the development of new knowledge and increased competence about children with cochlea implants through inclusive classroom studies of a selected case. Our objective is to explore and describe:

- The interaction between learner and environment /school
- Cooperation with more competent peers

Within the frame of didactic-curriculum theory (Johnsen, 2014) and comparative case study methodology, we focus on inclusive teaching practices and classroom management through the didactic-curricular topics:

- Assessment
- Individual Educational Plan
- Educational methods
- Classroom organisation

The main research questions are:

- How does the school teach in accordance with the pupil/s' different levels and needs for support in the learning process?
- What are the recourses, barriers and dilemmas in the school's development towards inclusion?

Based on these questions, the research problem is defined as exploring qualitative aspects of the inclusion process of a child with a cochlea implant.

Definition of research goals. The aim is "to give a description of the life and events in the inclusive classroom", and the study's goals are thus the following:

- To determine the social implications of the disability
- To obtain insight into the individual differences of the teachers' approaches regarding the estimation of the respondent's abilities

Definition of research questions

1. Do the teachers use identical methods during the realization of subject content for a child with a cochlea implant, and how do these methods vary regarding their individual requests?
2. What are the main characteristics of the social interaction of the respondent and his peers?
3. What are the main characteristics of the social interaction of the respondent and his teachers?
4. What are the main characteristics of the social interaction of the respondent and pupils from the other classes at school?
5. Has the school made certain adaptations according to the respondent's needs?
6. Is the respondent treated equally by his teachers as all the other pupils are treated?
7. Which teaching methods are used in the teaching process of a child with a cochlea implant in a regular school?

Research methodology. The research that we have conducted is actually action research. The **action research** has been conducted for the purpose of solving a problem or collecting information to improve existing practice. To achieve maximum success, the action research should result in an **action plan** or **development of working strategies**, which in an ideal situation can be implemented and further evaluated. We decided to conduct a participatory action research project. Although participatory action research shares the focus for a specific local question and uses the data for the action implementation, it differs in some main points from practical action research. The first difference is that it has two additional goals: to motivate the individuals and groups to improve their lives and contribute to change at school. Accordingly, the research involves a number of individuals with different experiences and points of view that are focused on the same problem. This involves their joint work with data gathering and -analyses, interpretation of the data and the actions that follow. Due to this the research is most commonly called collaborative research. Thus, participatory action research is a collaborative approach towards research that enables individuals to take systematic actions with the purpose of solving specific problems. This encourages consensual, democratic and participatory strategies whose aim is to encourage the participants to explore the problems that influence them.

The action research project includes four main phases:

1. Identifying the research problem or question
2. Collecting the needed information to answer the questions
3. Analysing and interpreting the collected information
4. Developing an action plan or working strategies.

This longitudinal study is actually a **case study** involving exploration of “a restrained system” or a case with detailed data collection that involves multiple sources of information (observations, interviews, audio-visual material, documents and reports). The context of this case involves the placement in a selected school. Data analysis consists of a holistic analysis of the entire case. The case study is actually an exploration of a closed system – a selected class – over a certain time period, through a detailed, intensive collection of information that includes multiple sources of information. Conducting a case study may contain a large number of texts and approaches from which the case study is developed. Yin (1989) uses a mix of qualitative and quantitative approaches towards the case study using extensive, systematic procedures for the studying.

Informants – participants

We decided to explore all the events connected with everyday school life of one child with a cochlea implant within the inclusive classroom. During the research period, we observed a 12-year-old subject during the first year (13 during the second year of research). The child was a male fifth grader (sixth grader). As mentioned, the research was conducted in a specifically selected elementary school chosen because of its high quality reputation. The phenomenon of study was followed for two years, from 2006 till 2008.

We monitored the phenomenon of teaching and learning this child over two school years, and continuously analysed observation data in the classrooms where the teaching was held. This means that we followed the progress of the child, and completed data summarization twice a year for each of the school subjects (as the child had different teachers in each subject). After every data gathering session and its analysis, we undertook instructive work with the teachers. This was conducted by professionals – special educators and rehabilitators. The instructive work was held after the analyses were made and the video data watched, and it consisted of suggesting strategies of working with the child in focus in the inclusive environment.

Research methods, techniques and instruments

Having the objective of making a holistic analysis of the case, we decided on a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods in line with Yin's (1989) recommendations. A number of researchers give practical suggestions concerning how quantitative information can be combined with qualitative research, such as when simple techniques for counting are added to findings revealed through intensive qualitative studies. This additional information analysis gives the reader holistic insight into the case.

Of course, merely making calculations is not enough; without a theoretical background for the received categories, the counting techniques provide only partial validity for the research. The quantification can be adjusted to the logic of the qualitative research in situations when, instead of conducting studies or experiments, we count the natural categories that come from the participants and occur in the natural surroundings. The line between the qualitative and the quantitative is less distinct than we imagine. All the qualitative data can be quantitatively coded in infinitely different ways. All the quantitative data is based on a qualitative assessment.

With the purpose to undertake solid research, we use both the qualitative and quantitative paradigm. While there are fundamental differences between the qualitative and quantitative approaches, they primarily lie on the level of assumptions regarding the research (epistemological and ontological assumptions).

There will always be debates between qualitative and quantitative researchers. Nonetheless, the number of researchers interested in combining the two traditions is increasing. They believe that social research will become more fruitful if there are variations among research approaches and methods. In this research project we used the parallel model connecting the qualitative and the quantitative approaches. This model has a tendency to simultaneously include the two procedures for data collection. We as researchers marked the patterns of behaviour and counted the frequency for each question. The advantage of this approach is that it allows a more complete, longer use of highly contextual research concerning the discovery and identification of the phenomena.

Triangulation. Regarding the standards of quality, we made an extensive verification through triangulation, which is directly connected with the data collection. The triangulation protocol was based on information resources, researcher, theory and methodological questions. Triangulation is based on use of more than one method and/or information source in the study of a social

phenomenon, with emphasis on research methods and information sources. The multi-method and multi-source or triangulation approach seeks to secure greater confidence in qualitative findings, and is thus a classic approach to gain trustworthiness.

Research technique. In this longitudinal study we will apply participative observation technique, which is one of the basic techniques used in qualitative research. Two fundamental items define its nature; 1) the data are primarily collected by observation; and 2) the researcher participates in the observed phenomenon. This research technique has a particular utilization in so-called classroom life research. It implies a direct introduction to the teaching process and the process of learning in a natural context, as well as an introduction to recognizing the manner in which the participants in the teaching process experience the events in their classroom. During this research period, we also used the following techniques:

- Case history analyses (analysis and research of all the data and information regarding the informant's condition, development and progress)
- Semi-structured interview (this was used for the research on interpersonal relations)

Research instruments. We used a checklist for observing the participation of the child with a cochlear implant within the inclusive classroom. We also added the use of video indicators to the observation, which we used as parameters for the exploration of classroom management. We were guided by the indicator for observation of the interaction between the teacher and pupils with which we monitored the initiative following; accommodation, approval, change of sequence and giving instructions. We decided to record the phenomena by making notes as well as using a digital camera and audio recorder.

Conducting the research

Gaining access to the field. Before starting the research process, we successfully overcame the problem of gaining approval from relevant authorities and institutions. In the beginning, we determined the school and classes where the observation would take place, and we identified the main participant in the research project.

Degree of participation in the research. The researcher had the role of participant observer. In this case the group was previously informed about the

classroom observation and the researcher was free to move around and talk to anyone he wanted to, guided by his research interests. Of course, this behavioural freedom grew gradually, as the role of the researcher progressed from being an outsider to an insider in the selected classroom.

Analysis

For the purpose of making a holistic analysis of the phenomenon we were exploring, we decided to conduct a so-called **ongoing analysis** using the **parallel model** combination of qualitative and quantitative approach. Regarding standards, we made extensive verification with the use of triangulation, as accounted for above. The **protocol for triangulation** was based on data resources, researchers, theory and methodological issues. The ongoing analysis was conducted in five steps: 1) Introduction to the data; 2) Determining a theme framework; 3) Indexing; 4) Grouping and tabulation and 5) Categorization.

The research data gained from the video indicators for interaction and the checklist for observation of the participation of the child with a cochlea implant was analysed using elementary statistical procedures which are expatiated through the protocol of triangulation.

Relevant ethical questions

The question of **confidence** is the first question that we inspected in the frames of the research process' ethical aspect. Gaining confidence of hearing impaired persons is difficult, as there is not only a close correlation with their personal psychology, but also their own personal experiences. The best way for a researcher to gain the needed confidence is by assuring the respondent's anonymity according to the parents' wishes.

The second ethical issue was to secure **emotional security** in the beginning as well as later stages of the study. This can be assured by having frequent meetings including the respondent, researcher and of course the teaching staff. The cooperation and help that the researcher gives to the respondent contributes to the latter's acquiring emotional security, as seems to be the case in our research.

A third ethical question is connected with **cooperation**, which is a necessary postulate for the study that follows. Based on previous experience, we concluded that cooperation with parents and teachers was to be at the highest level possible. Keeping in mind our cooperation with the child from the very beginning,

we thought that the adaptation period for him to a new and perhaps unstable environment would last for a long period of time (new face, instruments for noting the phenomenon, instruments for recording the phenomenon). Fortunately, this situation was easily overcome. Of course, the experience of the researcher connected to working with individuals with hearing impairment contributed to reducing mistrust, and it resulted in remarkable cooperation.

The question of **generalization** is a question that is highlighted in every study if the same does not involve the whole population. With respect to this particular research project, we decided to observe one respondent, and this decreased the possibility for generalization of the data. While we cannot project the findings on the entire population of children involved in an inclusive process, this research is expected to provide an excellent basis for future comparative research projects.

The question of **objectivity** is the last ethical question; namely, how objective can the researcher be in a situation of frequent meetings and active participation in the teaching process with the respondent? The researcher can usually be placed in a situation to interpret certain events according to his personal beliefs, prejudices or previous experiences. Of course, it is absolutely necessary that researchers have a certain background connected to a specific qualitative study. They have to be emotionally stable individuals that can achieve the needed emotional connection with the main respondent, but at the same time are able to cooperate with the respondent without allowing the emotional closeness to influence his/her judgment: In this way researchers create distance from the possibility of their inserting certain subjective opinions into their studies.

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