

# Methodology in Studies of Support for Pupils with Speech and Language Impairments in Regular Primary Schools

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## Introduction

This article describes and discusses the methodology used in the research of the Sarajevo University research team in order to find out how two selected regular primary schools support pupils with speech and language impairments in classrooms developing inclusive education<sup>59</sup>. The primary intention of this research is to gather and discuss the great variety of aspects of this support in accordance with the eight main areas of the teaching and learning process.<sup>60</sup>

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59. Inclusive education is a process by which a school attempts to respond to all pupils as individuals by reconsidering and restructuring its curricular organisation and provision and allocating resources to enhance equality of opportunity. Through this process the school builds its capacity to accept all pupils from the local community who wish to attend and, in so doing, reduces all form of exclusion and demeaning of pupils be it for their disability, ethnicity, or anything that could render the school life of some children unnecessarily difficult (ETF-European Training Foundation, 2009).
60. The pupil/s, Assessment, Educational intentions, Educational content, Class organisation and teaching methods, Communication, Care and Frame factors – The Curriculum Relation Model is developed by Johnsen (1998; 2001; 2003 & 2007).

## Research design

The nature of the phenomenon being investigated in this study, as well as the main research question, has required a qualitative<sup>61</sup> approach based on multiple sources of information gathered through observation, individual interviews and document analysis. This approach allows for an in-depth investigation of phenomena of various support forms which has been given by teachers, peers, professional school team, parents and other persons applying different activities. During the process of data collection, and in comparing the data of two schools, our research team partly applied action research,<sup>62</sup> which occurred as a consequence of real needs and current situation in one research school that has not participated before in seminars, training or interactive workshops about inclusive education. The workshops for teachers were implemented using the themes: speech and language impairments, pupils with special needs and individualization in the teaching and learning process and, at the same time, individual and group advisory sessions to teachers in this school.

## Purposeful sampling of the two primary schools and classes in Sarajevo

The purposeful sampling procedure that was used is typical for qualitative research (Creswell, 2003; Gall, Gall & Borg, 2003; Robson, 2002). Among 64 ordinary primary schools in the Canton of Sarajevo (Ministry of Education and Science, Canton Sarajevo, 2008), two primary schools were purposefully selected for this research. For the sake of anonymity, the two schools are given the labels School A and School B.

**School A.** Several projects focusing on child-centred education had already been implemented in School A, including the long-term project entitled *Institutional Competence Building and Cooperation with two Bosnian Universi-*

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61. Qualitative research is multi-method in its focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2003; Creswell, 2003).

62. According to Gall, Gall & Borg (2003) Action research in education is a form of applied research whose main purpose is improvement of an educational professional practice. Action research done for personal purposes is generally intended to promote greater self-knowledge, fulfilment and raise professional awareness among other practitioners.

*ties: Special Needs Education towards Inclusion*, financially supported by the Norwegian Cooperation Programme with South-East SØE 06/02 (see also Johnsen et al, 2007). One of the goals of this project was to develop through innovation, teaching approaches that support learning of pupils with special educational needs within the development of the inclusive classroom (Johnsen, 2007). Thus, this school has had relevant training in the field of inclusive education and many other educational projects. The school is located in an urban part of Sarajevo with multicultural diversity, and minority pupils with bilingual backgrounds such as Roma and Albanian languages, are parts of the total population<sup>63</sup>.

**School B** is located outside of Sarajevo in a neighbouring municipality. Participation in this project is the first opportunity for School B to take part in an educational project or in seminars concerning development of interactive education and inclusion, although the school has children with special needs, including several who are intellectually challenged and diagnosed with Down syndrome. School B also has pupils with bilingual backgrounds (Albanian) and children with speech and language impairments. In both schools, many of the pupils' families are fractured and deal with very difficult social-economic situations.

The two selected schools therefore represent significant variations when it comes to their former participation in innovation projects and their development of approaches to support pupils with special educational needs, such as speech and language difficulties, which are in focus in this project.

**Selection of classes.** The reasons for choosing 2<sup>nd</sup> graders in these schools are their age, learning experiences and the fact that the class has at least either one child with speech and language impairments or a bilingual child. Teachers in these 2<sup>nd</sup> grades were part of the research focus. They were all women with approximately 15 years of working experience, and they were selected because they taught in classes with pupils with speech and language impairments.

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63. The population in BiH consists of a diversity of groups who have inhabited the country for centuries. They have different cultural characteristics, such as more or less different language traits, religions and demographic mobility. The three main groups are: Bosnian, Serbian, and Croatian, and in addition there are smaller groups such as Jews, Romas, Albanians, Sandzaks and other minority groups.

Table 1 Sample procedure

Primary School A	3 classes from 2 <sup>nd</sup> grade	1 Pupil with stuttering (Boy)
		1 Pupil bilingual (Girl –Roma pupil)
		1 Pupil with dyslalia and dyslexia (girl)
Primary School B	3 classes from 2 <sup>nd</sup> grade	1 Pupil bilingual (Girl –Albanian pupil)
		1 Pupil (dyslalia)
		1 Pupil (dyslexia and dysgraphia)

## Methods and instruments

The use of more than one method of data collection is called triangulation in research methodology literature<sup>64</sup> (Creswell, 2003; Gall, Gall & Borg, 2003; Flick, 2002; Yin, 2003). In this sense and with the intention of satisfying the principle of validity, this research applies observation, semi-structured interviews and document analysis in addition to outlining the contextual aspects of this research.

**Observation** is applied as a main method where a team of researchers systematically watches, listens and records the phenomenon of providing different kinds of support to pupils with special needs. The research team conducts a direct, non-participant observation. The intention is to gather data from an etic<sup>65</sup> perspective about the phenomenon. Observation entails listening and watching what happens during the teaching and learning processes of pupils with speech and language impairments (Robson, 2002). Before observations are conducted, the research team visits the class with the intention of reducing reactivity and bias. Still, there is a possibility that the researchers influence the teachers, class activities and pupils' behaviour through their presence and use of video recordings. Six observations were conducted; 3 observations per each school for a duration of 45 minutes. The video recorded data (about 4 – 5 hours in total) was transcribed into written form. Transcripts were summarised and analysed through previously developed categories. The observations were structured by using a pre-prepared observation guide form based on activities in the interaction between teacher-pupil/pupil-pupil through the main aspects of: The

64. Multiple sources of information are used because no single source can be trusted to provide comprehensive information (Patton, 1990).

65. The etic perspective is defined as the investigator's viewpoint, while the emic perspective presents the participant's (teachers, pupils) viewpoint of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2003; Gall, Gall & Borg, 2003).

pupil/s – Assessment – Educational intentions – Educational content – Class organization and teaching methods – Communication – Care – Frame factors.

**The interview** method is used as a thorough follow-up of pupils' and teachers' answers in order to obtain more information and explore specific statements of different kinds of support in the development of inclusive practices. The main purpose is to attempt to understand the phenomenon of teaching and learning processes and give/receive support to pupils with special needs, as it is perceived from the teachers' and pupils' points of view (emic perspective). The prepared interview guide and mp3 recording of the interviews (with permission from the teachers and pupils) were used in order not to lose valuable information. A tape recording provides a complete verbal record, and it can be studied much more thoroughly than data in the form of interview notes. Recording also reduces the tendency of interviews to make an unconscious selection of data favouring their biases (Gall, Gall & Borg 2003).

**Document analysis** is a suitable additional method related to our Bosnian and regional/international conceptual aspects of research. Documents are basic sources of information about research background, school activities and teaching and learning processes, as well as teachers' activities, including professional development/education. Various documents are used from school/pedagogical archives about the pupils, pupils' notebooks, school reports, pedagogical reports, documents from government and non-governmental institutions (NGOs).

## Conducting the study and analysing the data

When the research team is satisfied with the modifications of the instruments and piloting, we start visiting the selected research schools several times according to our action research outcomes and proceeding with fieldwork activities. This means that the research team, besides data collection, also implements workshops, lectures, consultation discussions with teachers related to the inclusive education issues, but also mediates in certain activities in order to support children with speech and language impairments.

The data collection is always performed in pairs in order to ensure the validity of data, and the transcription is completed on the same day to safeguard the results' authenticity.

The collected data from different multiple sources of information are analysed qualitatively. The analysis started during the field work while data collection was still in progress. Based on extensive data collected from both research

schools, the research team has first developed the main categories of the research phenomena, subsequently developing the sub-categories belonging to the issues of the main categories according to their characteristics. Both similarities and differences were observed between the research schools A and B, with a brief summary after the interpretation of every category. The process of analysis was related to categories and sub-categories so that similar data categorized under similar conceptual labels (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

## Ethical issues

Given the fact that every research project in education that involves human subjects implies ethical issues (Creswell, 2003), the Sarajevo University research team follows these steps:

- Securing informal consent from school principals and teachers for conducting the research project
- Permission is applied for and gained from the pupils' parents. Parents are informed that the study includes observations, video recordings and interviews of their children
- All data obtained during data collection are treated with confidentiality
- In order to secure the schools', teachers' and pupils' privacy and anonymity, none of their names are used in research reports; participants are referred to with labels.

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