

# Older adult students with special educational needs in the university environment

## Abstract

The objective of this work is to reflect through the theoretical framework, and the experience in university teaching, on the Special Educational Needs (SEN) in the elderly and their access to the university. A brief review was made to find out if the universities had specific programs to serve the elderly with SEN who access the university. In addition, a didactic proposal is proposed, based on musical education, to attend to SEN, inclusion and attention to diversity in the elderly. On the other hand, the need for more rigorous musical training and education for future teachers is highlighted. In conclusion, it is recognized that there are no specific programs for SEN related to older people who access university. On the other hand, the training of future teachers regarding musical education and SEN is valued.

**Keywords:** older adults, training; special educational needs, musical education

Volume 8 Issue 2 - 2023

**Ana Mercedes Vernia Carrasco**

Department of Education and Specifics didactics, University of Jaume I, Spain

**Correspondence:** Ana Mercedes Vernia Carrasco, Department of Education and Specifics didactics, University of Jaume I, Spain, Tel 616200681, Email verni@edu.uji.es

**Received:** April 15, 2023 | **Published:** April 26, 2023

## Introduction

Older people are entitled to the same aid and recognition as any student in any field or educational level. In the university environment, this consideration must also be present so that older adults can access it without any type of exclusion. For this reason, teacher and student training is essential. Teachers must acquire the necessary skills to facilitate inclusion and attend to the diversity of all types of students. In this sense, music education, as an inclusive tool, must be rigorously included in teacher training.

Among the barriers found, cost is usually the main one, for students with specific learning needs, since many of them need assistive devices and adapted technology, the lack of which can become an obstacle. For instance, despite international guidelines, many deaf students do not have access to the necessary tools that allow them to continue their education without difficulties. Working with these students should not make us see them as a homogeneous group and the resources should be adapted to their condition, age and socioeconomic context.<sup>1</sup>

Gracia Ordóñez<sup>1</sup> highlights three ideas:

- 1) Learning must be inclusive and personalized
- 2) We must take into account the different learning styles of our students, especially those who “learn by doing”
- 3) The use of digital tools allows ubiquity, that is, access to information from any place and time.

With the intention of generating knowledge about the importance of the teaching function regarding the professional competences of Music and Physical Education teachers as the basis of a quality education that respects the real characteristics of the environment in which it develops and adjusts to the particularities of the students to whom it is directed. Regarding the conclusions, the selective system suggests proposing future lines of research that provide greater coherence and reduce the strong contradictions found in the selection of teachers in our current system of access to the public teaching function.<sup>2</sup>

After several years teaching in the university space and in didactics of musical expression, we have observed that students arrive with certain special needs, however, teachers are not informed sufficiently in advance. In some cases, it is not even reported. On the other hand,

it is the classmates themselves who have some needs, which have not been detected in the famous selectivity or university entrance tests. In this work we have limited ourselves to making a small assessment from our own experience and from what we have found related to Special Educational Needs (SEN) and the responsibility that we must assume, both as teachers and from the university. We have completed our experience with a brief review of the programs that universities have regarding SEN. Although universities continuously work to serve special students, on the other hand, there is no mention of the elderly, their access to the university based on different abilities.

Our first hypotheses are, on the one hand, due to the lack of detection in university entrance exams, when Special Educational Needs (SEN) are not physical, nor are they accompanied by any report, regarding the elderly. And, on the other hand, we are aware of the relevant contributions that active musical education can offer, in emotional processes, psychomotricity, communication, social and personal relationships, or other factors of this nature. For this reason, our proposal is divided into two phases, a first, where detection is fundamental in access to university and, therefore, the type of test must be changed, renewed or adapted, as well as the evaluation and those who assess it. And the second part is the tools that can help, such as music education. An issue that worries us, in this sense, is the lack of training received by university teachers related to the training of older people, in terms of attention to students with SEN in the classroom. In this sense, we propose within our work that the university contemplate this type of training, not when a case is detected, but as part of the complementary training of the teacher.

## Theoretical framework

We can understand by students with SEN, those who in their study process need certain supports and educational attention.<sup>3</sup> In the LOGSE,<sup>4</sup> Law for the General Regulation of the Spanish Educational System, the concept of SEN is linked to the diversity of students, specifying those who need less common help, temporarily or permanently and in a complementary and specialized way.

It was Warnock,<sup>5</sup> who proposed that qualifiers such as mentally retarded, physically handicapped, language disorders, maladjusted or similar be replaced by special educational needs, considering it inappropriate to classify people according to their deficit. This new concept addresses needs instead of disabilities, as well as being broader. In this line, Brennan<sup>6</sup> considers that the space of special

education must interact with the curriculum, the teaching, support and learning conditions that allow addressing SEN in a significant way.

Langa Rosado and Lubián Graña<sup>7</sup> confirm, through an innovation and research project, that most Spanish universities are in an advanced initial phase of implementing Attention to Diversity (AD) policies as part of its social responsibility. However, the study of the ethical and/or political assumptions on which the specific AD practices are based is a field that has not yet been explored. From what we can deduce, the Spanish university system currently recognizes the importance of the SEN of its students, although it seems that older adult students are not included or attended to in these programs. In any case, it is a matter of concern and therefore both material and human resources are devoted to it.

### Musical education and SEN

The incidence of music on the central nervous system can produce relaxation, stimulation, etc. in addition to awakening memories, emotions or feelings. On the other hand, students with SEN have a good response to musical stimuli, depending on their limitations.<sup>8</sup> The main objective is to allow the student to express themselves through music, developing both social and communication skills. These authors, in reference to the intervention in the student with special educational needs, refer to a series of elementary procedures that interact with:

- a) Listen, pay attention, learn to perform selective listening.
- b) Motor coordination based on different rhythmic activities: Singing, percussion, playing instruments, dancing.
- c) Self-concept, self-esteem, awareness of the possibilities offered by “my body” as an instrument capable of “making music”.
- d) The relationship with others and with the environment, using music as a means of communication and expression of feelings and ideas through the voice, musical instruments and the body.
- e) Respect the voices of the classmates, the turn to sing or play, accept the instructions to sing or play in a group.
- f) Attend concerts or musical activities scheduled for educational purposes, recognize and value other music, other instruments, and other popular, popular musical expressions.
- g) The recognition of sound parameters through sound exploration (intensity, timbre, height, duration, texture), Technology, using different materials: audiovisuals, computers, tape recorders, sound mixer “Learn to learn”, search, collect information of a musical nature, select sound materials: play music videos, record sounds from home, from the street, voices, listen, modify, interrelate.

One of the most relevant elements of music is rhythm, and it can be a very useful tool for working with children with certain SEN. In this sense, rhythmic activities are ideal for motor coordination, while melody is related to the meaning of music, expression and affectivity. And the harmony affects the sensory, affective and mental part, from the chain of chords.<sup>8</sup>

Different studies show that the prefrontal cortex affects the participation and recovery of memories, relevant for learning and control of emotions, also associated with visual perception. On the other hand, music and emotions share a place in the prefrontal cortex. In addition, according to research from Dartmouth University, where eight musicians were analyzed, the musical processing area remains active during memory recovery and reasoning.<sup>9</sup>

### Didactic proposal

Our proposal links disciplines such as music education, attention to diversity, tutoring and guidance, to facilitate the educational inclusion of students with SEN in older adult students and their access to university. As a musician, and not as a music therapist or psychologist, teachers with degrees in psychology are needed, who can detect in the access phase, certain attitudes or delimitations that may indicate some type of SEN. For the second phase, after detection, the music specialist teacher must work as a team not only with the students but also with the staff of the department (or similar organization) for attention to diversity.

**1st Phase:** In addition to the ordinary or standard tests for university access, a second oral test will be developed.

**2nd Phase:** Group interview that allows observation (behavior) individually or in groups. Formulation of a series of questions to be answered in groups and individually. To obtain information about some type of SEN.

### Communicative competence

Through corporal expression from a selection of music proposed by the Participants.

### Psychomotor competence

From musical expression through the body. Rhythmic motor body games using music with different tempos.

### Attention and concentration

From musical memory, through songs. And the bodily reaction of rhythmic proposals.

### Social and personal competences

From musical proposals and corporal-musical expression in a group.

If information is obtained that shows any SEN related to psychomotricity, emotion, character, communication, etc. Music could be used as a tool to improve skills, such as oral and written comprehension, verbal and body communication, or attention and concentration, as well as other skills associated with social and personal skills, such as relationships with peers. We believe that music education could strengthen weak points.<sup>10, 11</sup>

### Conclusions and discussion

We believe that this practical application can guarantee better attention to diversity, and a more real educational inclusion, with the particularity of being able to interact from music education with older adults who wish to access or continue their university education, avoiding any type of exclusion. . In this way, attention is paid to real gerontological inclusion in an educational and training environment. We are aware of our initial doubts when observing behaviors that were not common in the university classroom for the elderly, and this initially led us to reflect, from our own ignorance in the field of psychology, although we believe that inclusion was appropriate, since the activities allowed a wide flexibility to be able to attend to the different student profiles.<sup>12, 13</sup>

It is considered that the most important thing is to attend to diversity from the beginning of access to the university and above all that teachers are aware of these situations and that their complementary training also includes this area of knowledge. On the

other hand, it is understood that musical training is essential to be able to develop these actions in the training of older adults. It is considered that specialist music teachers with considerable training in pedagogy and psychology could be recommended. However, teachers, with adequate musical training, would also be an ideal profile to be able to implement musical activities that help detect profiles of students with educational needs. In addition, from music education, music teachers can also help and collaborate with psychologists from educational centers and universities, to improve the skills of people with Special Educational Needs.<sup>14</sup>

## Acknowledgements

None.

## Conflicts of interest

The authors declare they have no conflicts of interest that are directly or indirectly related to the research.

## Funding

None.

## References

1. Gracia Ordóñez J. Strategies to reduce the digital gap in students with specific educational support needs. *Educational Andalusia*. 2020.
2. Vicente Búñez MR, Vicente Búñez A. Perception of professional competences in the selection procedures of music and physical education teachers. *Journal of Sport and Health Research*. 2018;10(supl 1):221–234.
3. Tortosa Ybáñez MT, González Gómez C, Navarro Soria I. Students with special educational needs: detection and work for educational optimization. *Int J Dev Edu Psychol*. 2014;1(7):63–72.
4. Loggon. Organic Law 1/1990, of October 3, on the General Regulation of the Educational System. 1990.
5. Peydró S, Agustí J, Company J. The education of students with serious and permanent special educational needs. Ministry of Culture, Education and Science. Valencia; 1997.
6. Brennan WK. The curriculum for children with special needs. Madrid: Siglo XXI. 1988.
7. Langa Rosado D, Lubián Graña C. Attention to Diversity in Spanish universities through the speeches of their leaders. *Complutense Magazine of Education*. 2021;32(1):79–88.
8. Bernal J, Epeld A, Rodríguez A. The Musical Education of the child with Special Needs. CIDd. II Congress of Didactics. University of Granada; 2010.
9. Gómez Guardado B. Cerebral laterality and left-handedness. Development and Neuro-Rehabilitation. México: Palibrio LLC; 2013.
10. Benetti A. Autoethnography as an artistic research method on expressiveness in piano performance. *Opus*. 2017;23(1):147–165.
11. Casanova MT. CEE Educational Participation. 2011;18:8–24.
12. Guerrero Muñoz J. The value of auto-ethnography as a source for social research: from method to narrative. *AZARBE. International Journal of Social Work and Wellbeing*. 2014;3:237–242.
13. Gómez Montes JM. Guidelines and strategies to understand and address diversity in the classroom. *Pulse*. 2005;28:199–214.
14. Martínez Muñoz M. Guidance and tutoring at the university within the framework of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). *Sources Magazine*. 2009;9:78–97.