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# Readings for diversity: abilities and variables of use in future teachers

## Lecturas para la diversidad: competencias y variables de uso en los futuros maestros

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## Abstract

The need for adequate training in attention to diversity and its reading possibilities in the classrooms of future teachers is an educational and, therefore, a social objective. The aim of the present study is to know the training that students have regarding diversity and their readings in order to assess the situation. To address the proposed work, the concepts of diversity and attention to diversity are first defined; then, the analytical study carried out with 70 fourth grade students in Primary Education (University of La Rioja) during three academic courses is presented. This quantitative exploration offers the results of the media variables, thematic preferences and the choice of a reading on attention to diversity for the classroom. From the collected data, we can conclude that, globally, they respond to the urgency of an adequate training on diversity, especially bearing in mind that the global computer network is the most consulted when there is a need to know –versus other important channels in educational scopes- Thus, curtails the vision of the wide range that shapes the subject in question.

## Resumen

La necesidad de una adecuada formación sobre la atención a la diversidad y sus posibilidades lectoras en las aulas de futuros maestros es una meta educativa y, por ende, social. El objetivo de la presente investigación se centra en conocer la preparación que los estudiantes poseen en relación con la diversidad y sus lecturas y, así, valorar el estado de la cuestión. Para abordar el trabajo propuesto, se acotan inicialmente los conceptos diversidad y atención a la diversidad; posteriormente, se muestra el estudio analítico realizado a 70 alumnos de cuarto del Grado en Educación Primaria (Universidad de La Rioja) durante tres cursos académicos. Esta exploración de corte cuantitativo ofrece los resultados de las variables correspondientes a medios de información, preferencias temáticas y elección de una lectura de atención a la diversidad para el aula. A partir de los datos recogidos, se extraen conclusiones que, de forma global, responden a la urgencia de una adecuada formación de la diversidad, máxime teniendo en cuenta que la red informática mundial es la más consultada ante cualquier necesidad de conocimiento -frente a otros canales importantes en ámbitos educativos- y que, como tal, cercena la visión del amplio abanico que conforma el tema en cuestión.

## Introduction

Classrooms are a mirror of society, that is, a pluralistic picture from individual, social and contextual perspectives. In these educational spaces, it is necessary to address multidiversity as an asset since it is the convergence of differences (Coll & Miras, 2001), and so in education contexts, teaching practices must run to the demands of 21st century society. We are in an educational model that advocates inclusion (school for all, Arnáiz, 2003; school for diversity, Moriña, 2008) and that is in line with purpose 4 of the *Sustainable Development Goals*[1], which responds to "quality education: to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all"; in this commitment to educational equality, its goals indicate (section 4.5) that there is a need to "eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education […] for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations". The school must be the guarantor of the principle of equality and inclusion and, in this sense, the Spanish Organic Act of the Improvement of Education Quality (LOMCE) (2013), in its Preamble, Section I, outlines that "only a quality, inclusive, integrating and demanding education system guarantees equal opportunities and makes it possible for each student to develop his or her full potential". In line with this objective, Caride (2017) points out that it is necessary to "promote educational actions that, being consistent with the principles of equity and justice, make it possible to build a more democratic, inclusive and cohesive local-global society" (p. 245).

In this educational space for raising awareness of "the other", promoting the reading habit is an action of utmost importance (Martos-Núñez & Rösing, 2009) because it allows for education in values, broadening knowledge and getting closer to other realities (Besalú, 2002), situations and life experiences. According to Caride, Carballo and Gradaílle (2018) "Reading contributes to develop thinking and knowledge, create and affirm identity, to raise awareness of social reality, […]; to sum up, it makes us more critical, responsible and aware […]" (p. 15).

From this transversal perspective (Larrañaga-Rubio & Yubero-Jiménez, 2015), it is necessary to develop reading comprehension "in order to access information and transform it into knowledge" (p. 19) and to approach it from a perspective of competence.

But the leading role assumed by reading practices in the classroom as a well-defined plan is far from being a generalised action and, in fact, the large amount of readings that address issues linked to multidiversity are not generally implemented by teachers. We regret what this absence implies as a limitation of potentialities to work in line with attitudinal contents. It should not be forgotten that the classroom is the ideal space to promote feelings and emotions and, in this sense, we agree with Caride (2018) that reading "highlights the need for a new look" (p. 17), a comprehensive, sensitive and empathetic look, a perspective in which students and teachers in training should be educated.

Therefore, this research is based on the importance of tackling diversity from reading practice in plans for promoting and intervening in teaching; education students must value this reality in order to deal with it in their classes and develop their reading mediation work successfully. Attention to diversity responds to a comprehensive, flexible and humanist model that guarantees teaching adapted to the personal characteristics of the students because it considers inequalities to be non-exclusive, and teachers must thus be trained from this perspective (Competence in Diversity). Knowledge students have on this subject is therefore the starting point that will allow them to explore their own knowledge.

## Conceptual, legislative and classification details

### *Diversity*

The concept of diversity must be clarified along with that of the adjective diverse since, given their wide use, they are sometimes left out. They are included in the Dictionary of the Spanish Language, s.v. *diversity,* two meanings: meaning 1. "variety, dissimilarity, difference", and meaning 2 "abundance, a great deal of various different things"; s.v. *diverse,* meaning 1 of a different nature, species, number, shape, etc."; and meaning 2 "dissimilar". Likewise, in Moliner's lexical compendium, *Diccionario de uso del español,* s.v. *diversity,* "the fact of being *different or *multiples"; s.v. *diverse, -a, 1.* meaning 1 (infrequent) "distinct, not equal"; meaning 2 "different. Distinct. Another. Not the same". In the aforementioned definitions, there is a coincidence of semantic features that respond to variety and abundance, that is, heterogeneity and coexistence, and which correspond to nouns that encompass the current concept of diversity in the field of education: "consideration of the diverse to address it simultaneously".

As for the meaning of attention to diversity, in the words of Martínez-Ezquerro (2016), it is defined by the following terms:

> the set of educational actions that try to prevent and offer a response to the needs -temporary or permanent- of all the students of a school and, among them, those that require a specific action derived from personal or social factors related to situations of socio-cultural disadvantage, of high abilities, of linguistic compensation, or of physical, psychic or sensory disability, or with serious disorders of personality, behaviour or development, or with serious disorders of communication and significant curricular imbalance (p. 35).

### *Educational legislation*

The current regulations in education link attention to diversity, the promotion of the reading habit (Marina & De la Válgoma, 2005) and education in values because one of the basic objectives for the integral learning of students (Delors, 1996) is attitudinal education.

In the Preamble, Section I of Organic Act 8/2013, of 9th December, for the improvement of educational quality considers, the different talents that all students have and that must be promoted in a manner appropriate to each need are set forth. The schooling of students with learning difficulties is based on the principles of standardisation and inclusion, and ensures their non-discrimination and effective equality. And section X sets forth the possibility of accessing from diverse ways translated into learning improvement programmes, within this constructivist approach (Coll *et al.,* 1995).

Article 9 of Royal Decree 126/2014, of 28th February, establishing the basic curriculum of Primary Education, with regard to "Learning process and individualized attention", sets forth the need to prevent difficulties, customised work to establish reinforcement mechanisms, measures that can respond to support in the regular group, flexible groupings or adaptations of the curriculum; likewise, the reading habit should be encouraged (Quiles-Cabrera, Palmer & Rosal, 2015) and "a certain amount of time should be dedicated thereto daily" (art. 9, paragraph 2). Furthermore, Article 14 links students with specific educational support needs, that is, students with "special educational needs due to specific learning difficulties, Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), high intellectual capacities, late entry into the education system, or personal or school history condi-

tions". This is the first time that an educational standard mentions this type of disorder in detail.

### Classification of diversity

The classification of diversity can be very different. Brueckner and Bond (1984) offer a factorial-type organisation that responds to four circumstances: intellectual and neurological factors; physical and sensory factors; personal and social adaptation factors; and environmental and educational factors. Another arrangement is determined by Hallahan and Kaufman (1982), based on the most frequent educational needs arising from the following causes: visual perceptive disorders; visual-motor, motor, tactile and kinesthetic disorders; destructuring and hyperactivity; and language disorders: phonological, syntactic and morphological development.

But these taxonomies are incomplete because they do not value the components that affect diversity; therefore, a classification model that includes the various factors and their corresponding educational needs (Martínez-Ezquerro, 2016) has been used, as it deals with a complete perspective that is close to social reality and educational legislation. Educational needs are grouped into various orders that respond to arranged differences from the personal or restricted sphere to the broader or contextual sphere:
1. Individual differences: personal development, learning paces, abilities (high abilities, limitations in physical, psychic, sensory capacity, behavioural disorders…), cognitive styles, motivations and interests, needs, expectations, work and study habits and techniques, etc.
2. Social differences: development in disadvantaged social environments, belonging to ethnic or cultural minorities, lack of knowledge of the language used, itinerancy, hospitalisation and convalescence, etc.

3. Contextual differences: family situation.

This classification has been applied to organise part of the analysis from the corresponding surveys, as explained below.

## Method

As stated, the main objective of this research starts from the need to know the interests and education of students in the last year of the Therapeutic Pedagogy Degree in Primary Education at Universidad de La Rioja about the types of diversity and the different readings that address it to be worked on in the classroom.

In order to obtain accurate information, the quantitative methodological case study has been applied based on three surveys conducted among a population of 70 students in training who took the subject Spanish Language applied to Attention to Diversity. The data obtained are part of a self-assessment and consequent improvement of educational quality project -carried out by the person signing this paper- implemented over three consecutive academic years (2017/2018, 2018/2019 and 2019/2020) in the light of the needs found. As this is a specific subject, the maximum number of students enrolled amounts to 25, and the distribution (all of them Year 1 students) was 23 in Year 1, 22 in Year 2, and 25 in Year 3. Overall, 88.57% are female and 11.43% male; (in terms of age, 87% are 21 years old and 13% are 22); all of them are Spanish nationals and resident in La Rioja. It was not necessary to conduct a differential study of each course since the results were similar in all three cases and the general characteristics of the students did not vary. Therefore, the sum of the three yields results for all the students as a whole. The collection and analysis of data has made it possible to establish patterns of choice and use that will be interpreted later.
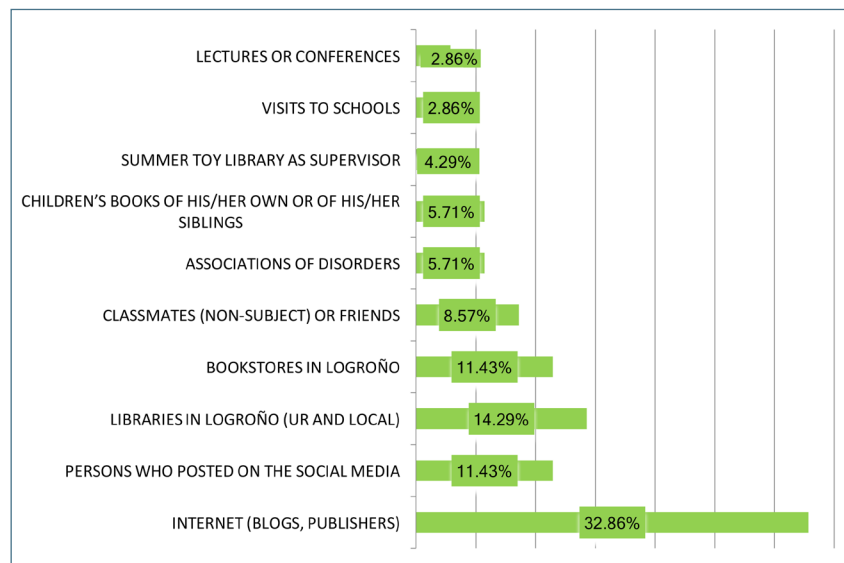
*Graph 1.* Media for readings that address attention to diversity.

With regard to the design of the research, it has already been stated that it is an exploratory type case study that starts with the quantitative collection of information from three surveys, two of which are necessarily descriptive, taking into account the data that needed to be obtained. They were carried out in the second week when the subject was implemented in order to know the background of the students' considerations (education by the teacher was carried out subsequently and in the light of the results obtained).

In relation to the surveys, given the nature of the subject, it was considered necessary to respond -as progress was made - in a comprehensive manner to the questions made. Firstly, a survey was carried out on their previous knowledge of the media or information channels to document the readings that address attention to diversity in Primary Education. The second survey took the reasons that drive the university student to select a reading that addresses some type of diversity as its point of reference, that is, the reasons for choosing a topic. In the third survey, a single reading had to be selected

to develop a curricular intervention in the classroom that would address one of the many diversities.

## Data analysis and results

The statistical analyses provide the data from each of the questions asked. The first question read as follows: What are the channels or media you use for classroom readings that address attention to diversity? Answers are shown in graph 1.

The answers with more hits referred to known these readings through the electronic media, that is, the digital sphere as an instrument of student culture; specifically, the number of students referring to the Internet as a source of information amounted to 23 (32.86%): 10 refer to blogs and 13 to publishers' websites. Search on the Internet is in accordance with the students' education, although it should be highlighted that the fact of selecting books from the websites of educational publishers shows the development of the related and necessary digital competence in

their field of education; remember that publishers offer current and precise information on this subject and carrying out a search in this sense is appropriate. On the other hand, the research extracted from blogs also shows the selective use of the resources offered by this space since these websites include interesting contents, updated and commented by their authors, resulting in an exchange of knowledge and ideas.

As for the information provided by people posting on social networks (8 answers, 11.43%), this is because they know them directly although this is not a powerful argument and as such is valid, but for the students this link with the writers is a guarantee (they understand that they are people with experience in the field), regardless of their education. This criterion -as such- is labile, just like the previous one, if not properly checked.

Answers coming from the information found in libraries (10, i.e., 14.29%) imply a different, less usual attitude on the part of the students to the necessary on site search for sources (Sánchez-García & Jiménez-Mañas, 2015); in this sense, it is important to highlight the importance of promoting the 21st century library by developing socio-educational intervention programmes (Sánchez-García & Yubero-Jiménez, 2016). This procedure is related to the following one, which corresponds to the search in bookstores (8 people, 11.43%), even here a more receptive attitude towards the possible acquisition of works is found (in relation to a book whose title was known to the student, the following statement is included: "I was just convinced by the shop assistant"). The answer of 6 students (8.57%) who requested information from other classmates or friends with experience is linked to the information provided by people who do not have *a priori* specific education, although the reliability of knowledge in this regard is questioned. We should be careful in this regard as there are "fake readers" and "occasional readers"

who need "comprehensive, solid and coherent education with the competences they have to develop as professionals" (Elche-Larrañaga & Yubero-Jiménez, 2019, p. 42), a circumstance that students cannot always discern.

Own experience is also a reason given on 4 occasions (5.71%) and responds to the consideration - on the part of the students - that their childhood or adolescent readings were adequate and, likewise, the books read by close relatives. It is an appropriate criterion that also denotes the subject of interest of the teacher who trained this young man.

Schools or toy libraries are considered to be useful places to find these readings, in this regard 3 students (4.29 %) found the information from their own experience as supervisors in summer toy libraries and 2 (2.86 %) in the visits made to schools.

Considering that attention to diversity is a specific issue, some students had contact with disorder associations (4, 5.71%) and others attended lectures or conferences (2, 2.86%). Both attitudes show the sensitivity and conscious need for (in)formation of the students.

The question raised in the second survey was as follows: What are your reasons for selecting a classroom reading that addresses attention to diversity? Answers are shown in graph 2.

The four items with the same number of answers, i.e. 8 and totalling 11.43%, correspond to the interest in the subject for various reasons ranging from the most external to the most personal sphere. The first one responds to curiosity towards these topics as a more general reason; the next one to empathy, since social problems that are classified within the topic are identified; the third one is due to personal knowledge (not family), as the case of dyslexia or immigration ("I chose the topic because of my
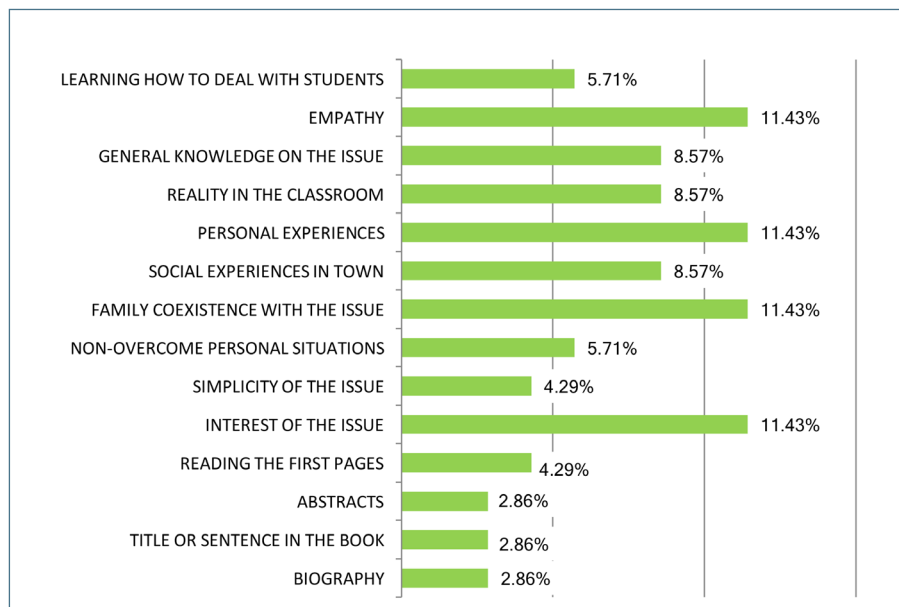
*Graph 2.* Reasons to select a reading that addresses attention to diversity.

own origin"); and the last one is due to family coexistence with the situation (Autism, Down's syndrome or domestic problems are mentioned).

The next group of answers share the number, 6 (8.57 %), and the reasons are the reality lived in the classrooms (intercultural coexistence), in the multicultural locality and for completing an initial general knowledge about the topic of interest (blindness, Down's syndrome, etc.). It should be noted that the school is a fundamental place to educate in intercultural skills.

In the third group, there are 2 reasons (4 answers, i.e. 5.71%) that respond to the link to personal situations lived and not overcome, it refers to physical complexes, mainly (one student indicates): "I chose it because it affects many people") and the need to learn to deal with the plurality of students.

The ease of understanding the topic, i.e. diversity in general, as well as the interest in reading the first pages of a book ("I couldn't stop reading", as stated in a survey) add up to 3 answers each, i.e. 4.29%.

The last of group, of 2 answers each (2.86 %), corresponds to aspects that are not linked to empathy or sensitivity, but rather value literary components, such as the interest raised by the abstracts, the author's biography or the suggestive title of the work.

In the third survey, it was proposed that they select one interesting reading to work on in the classroom -full curricular intervention- regarding any aspect of attention to diversity. No prior information was provided in this regard. The responses were arranged on the basis of the classification already given of the orders of diversity (individual, social and contextual differences) in figure 3.
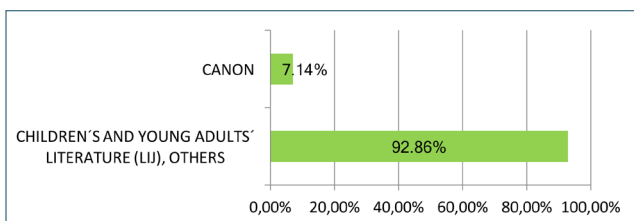
This third survey focuses on skills (31.43 %)[2] although it does not distance itself much from the thematic interest in ethnic minority or immigration (25.71%). Students focus on both of them when selecting their readings (the publishing market also offers plenty of titles related to these issues). It should also be noted that the main topics of interest that stand out quantitatively
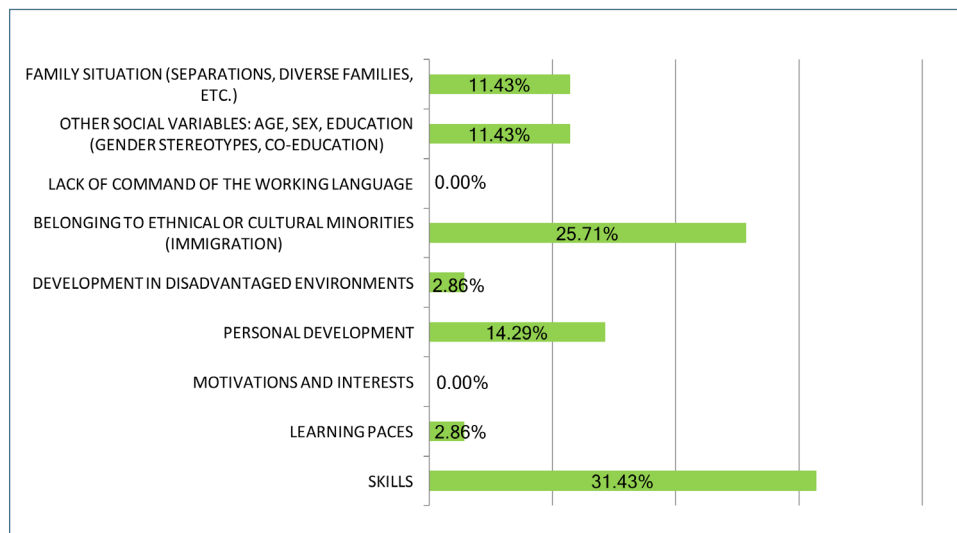
*Graph 3.* Reading classification for diversity.

(personal development, other social variables and the family situation are added) are linked



*Graph 4.* Authors.

to the projection of the student as a teacher in training who is aware of the diversity in his/her classroom, without forgetting his/her personal experiences together with the surrounding social reality.

Given the wide and varied list of works selected by the respondents (70 readings), establishing the proportions of issues relating to royalties, nationalities of authors, literary genres and publishing houses is deemed to be important. These variables also provide interesting information on trends and the influence of the media.

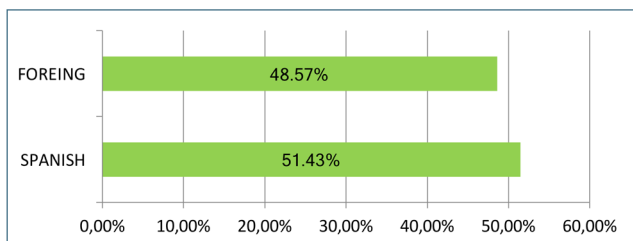In the section relating to authorship, the information set out in figure 4 was collected.

It is common for publishers of Children's and Young People's Literature to address these topical and highly commercial issues; aspects that also stand out in the answers obtained in the first question, the one corresponding to the media to access these topics (see graph 1). More specifically, 65 authors of children's and young people's literature (92.86%) compared with 5 (7.14%) who could be considered canonical, and who are

- Roald Dahl, *The Vicar of Nibbleswicke:* skills (dyslexia).
- Ana María Matute, *Paulina:* skills (visual disability).
- Hans Christian Andersen, *The Little Match Girl:* social differences (disadvantaged environments).
- Miguel de Unamuno, *Redondo, el contertulio*: social differences (disadvantaged social environments).
- Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, *Hansel and Gretel:* contextual differences (family situation).

Traditional literature has also provided specific material (Martínez-Ezquerro, 2017) that can be applied to this issue (there is a wide
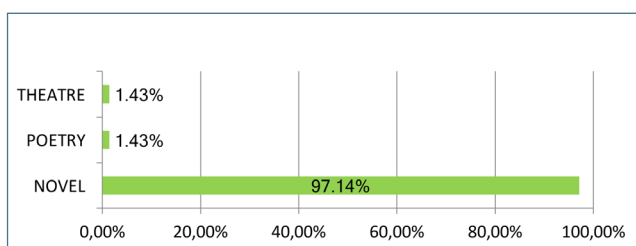
range of interpretations; think, for example, of Bettelheim, 1994; or other perspectives, such as that of Campos-F.-Fígares & García-Rivera, 2017).

As far as the nationality of the writers is concerned, there are 36 Spanish authors and 34 foreign authors (graph 5). Responses directly related to the dissemination by publishers in the different media, and especially on the Internet; that is, no preferences are found since the topics are what guide the search.
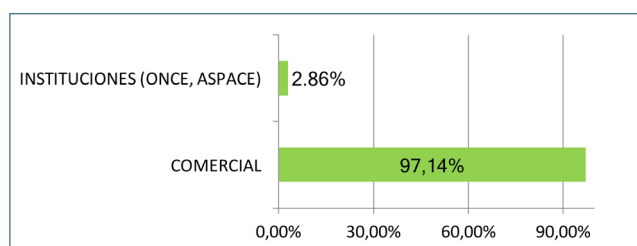
As far as publishers are concerned (figure 7), they are predominantly commercial (68 books) and only in two cases have alternatives been selected: Eva Latonda, *Aitor aviador,* published the National Organisation of Spanish Blind People (ONCE) (deals with ADHD) and Manuel Ferrero, *El reino de los mil escalones,* published by the Association of People with Cerebral Palsy (ASPACE) (deals with cerebral palsy), both come from knowledge (first question) based on the relationship with the associations that deal with these issues. It is a minority that shows the need for information and, therefore, education.



*Graph 5.* Nationalities.



*Graph 7.* Publishers.

As far as literary genres are concerned (figure 6), narrative predominates. Theatrical and poetic genres are generally overlooked in Primary Education. Thus, the results offer 68 novels or stories compared to a play (Luis Matilla, *El hombre de las cien manos*) and a collection of poems about the vicissitudes of Latin Americans fleeing a situation of poverty (Jorge Argueta, *Somos como las nubes*).



Graph 6. Literary genres.

## Discussion and conclusions

No specific previous studies on this issue were found, which would be interesting in order to cross-check the data presented (they can be expanded). Exploratory analysis has allowed us to know and, therefore, reflect on the need to address a systematic study on the following issues affecting the education of students in the field of reading promotion in diversity contexts: excessive influence of the globalised publishing world, scarce consultation of reliable sources, need for a transversal reading approach; wasted methodological reading possibilities; underestimated value of reading as a source of awareness, uninformed use of digital consultations or scarce presence of canonical authors, among other interesting issues. In this respect, some suggestions were collected from the respond-

ents: "there should be a specific section in book-stores", "search engines in libraries did not help as expected...".

In the light of the study, the analysis of the results obtained provides data that allow us to know and, therefore, improve the knowledge of students in training about diversity and their suitable readings. Their knowledge on the subject is not solid, as we have seen from the data collected. As for information channels, con-sultations are mainly based on the Internet, an aspect that is related to the predominant author-ship in the field of children's and young adults' literature (LIJ) as opposed to the canonical one, the wide range of commercial publishers and the almost exclusive use of narrative (which is easier to read and, therefore, to sell). Likewise, the reasons for the choice of the various themes are mainly based on the personal experiences of the students or are motivated by the sensitivity they feel towards the other, and in this sense what concerns/interests them most are the limitations of the physical, psychic or sensory capacity, and the questions related to multicul-turalism (mainly centred on ethnic minorities). In contrast, learning rates and development in disadvantaged environments are barely addressed, and cognitive styles, behavioural disorders, itinerancy and hospitalisation or con-valescence (the latter two perhaps more alien to their experiences) are forgotten. These answers also have their explanation in question number two, that is, the reasons for selecting a reading that deals with diversity, where they show a clear sensitivity towards the subject, but they denote that personal experience is what condi-tions the answer, and not the desired education (complementarity would be desirable). As for the reading selection, it is marked by insufficient knowledge shown in the previous questions, there is no instruction on the wide spectrum of diversity and the respondent resorts to disabil-ities and multiculturalism (or interculturality, Escarbajal, 2010), mainly, perhaps because of his or her own social situation or the diffusion of the media, and forgetting capital issues already pointed out.

Students need specific education on the relevant issue, although the population that has participated in the study offers a very specific profile -a marked sensitivity to the subject-since, as stated, they are students in the last year of the Therapeutic Pedagogy Degree in Primary Education. Students are, therefore, more receptive and respectful towards the other and, although they believe that reading plays and important role in the educational field, they need instruction to know the wide spectrum of diversity, to be critical of the various informa-tion channels, to know how to select them and, therefore, to discern readings on an informed basis; these premises would allow for more attentive and reflective students to deal with these issues, the purpose of which is to practice, through the competence approach promoted by the current educational legislation, interven-tions to promote reading with a focus on diversity (Araque & Barrio de la Puente, 2010). Deficient training of teachers is identified when dealing with the reading-diversity binomial, especially considering that educating in values is one of the basic objectives for the comprehensive education of students.

In short, teaching attention to diversity from reading practices to education students is an urgent need for instruction in our multi-diverse society (without forgetting the social inter-vention function inherent in teachers, López-Valero & Encabo-Fernández, 2016). Well into the 21st century, the context invites reflection on teaching in the field of Language and Literature Teaching, and so on in the words of Campos-F. Fígares and Quiles-Cabrera (2019), it is necessary to "rethink, update and implement their lines of research in order to respond to the educational demands of today's society with guarantees of a prosperous, egalitarian, plural and inclusive future" (p. 11).

## Notes

**1.** In 2015, the UN approved the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in order for countries and their societies to embark on a new path to improve the lives of all. The Agenda offers 17 Sustainable Development Goals, ranging from eliminating poverty to combating climate change, education, women's equality, environmental protection and the design of our cities (https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/es/).

**2.** The 22 answers in this section are broken down thematically and numerically as follows: high abilities, 1; autism, 4; Down's syndrome, 5; dyslexia, 4; Asperger's, 2; ADHD, 2; cerebral palsy, 1; and visual impairment, 3.

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