



# Teacher training in special education: study habits and teaching practice

## *Formación docente en Educación Especial: hábitos de estudio y práctica docente*

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### Abstract

The present research was carried out with students of the degree in Special Education of the normal school Fray Matías de Córdoba, located in the city of Tapachula de Córdoba and Ordóñez, Chiapas; Mexico. The objective of the article is to give an account of the study habits that the students have and the opinion they have of the teaching practice that the professors that form them perform. The results presented here were retrieved through a questionnaire applied to 101 students enrolled in the semester August 2015-January 2016. It was found that these students have as study habits mainly the realization of summaries and graphic organizers to appropriate the academic content of the anthology, which is a compilation of readings elaborated by a team of academics or by the teacher of a subject. At the same time, it was also found that the physical space of the house is the place where they especially perform the process of attending school tasks; As for the opinion students have of the teaching practice of the teachers, they pointed out that the student's oral presentations, the individual participation, the delivery of works and the written exam are daily practices in the professors that form them. It is concluded that the study habits and

the teaching practices of the teacher trainers are interwoven in the training of teachers in special education.

**Keywords:** Habit, school, special education, profession, teaching, teaching practice

### Resumen

La presente investigación se llevó a cabo con estudiantes de la licenciatura en Educación Especial de la escuela normal Fray Matías de Córdoba, ubicada en la ciudad de Tapachula de Córdoba y Ordóñez, Chiapas; México. El objetivo del artículo es dar cuenta de los hábitos de estudio que poseen los estudiantes y la opinión que tienen de la práctica docente que realizan los profesores que los forman. Los resultados que aquí se presentan se recuperaron a través de un cuestionario aplicado a 101 estudiantes matriculados en el semestre agosto 2015-enero 2016. Se encontró que estos estudiantes tienen como hábitos de estudio principalmente realizar resúmenes y esquemas para apropiarse del contenido académico que señala la antología —compilación de lecturas elaborada por un equipo de académicos o por el profesor de una asignatura—, nombran a la vez, que el espacio físico de la casa es el lugar donde especialmente realizan el proceso de atender las tareas

escolares; respecto a la opinión que tienen de la práctica docente de los profesores, indican que la exposición del estudiante, la participación individual, la entrega de trabajos y el examen escrito son prácticas cotidianas en los profesores que los forman. Se concluye, que los hábitos

de estudios y las prácticas docentes de los profesores formadores se imbrican en la formación de docentes en educación especial.

**Descriptor:** Docencia, educación especial, escuela, hábito, práctica docente, profesión

## 1. Introduction

The research was carried out with students of the degree in special education of Escuela Normal Fray Matías de Córdova, located in Tapachula of Cordova and Ordóñez, Chiapas, enrolled in the semester corresponding to August 2015-January 2016. The objective of the article is to analyze the student's study habits and the opinion they have regarding the teaching practice of the professors who teach them. A questionnaire was applied to 101 out of 104 students that formed 100% of students registered by that time.

Special education started in Mexico since the beginning of the nineteenth century; however, the first teacher training institution in the field of special education was created in 1867, initiating with the normal school of deaf-mute (Curriculum, 2004; Ministry of Public Education, 2010). In 1970, the General Office of Special Education was created, which would regulate the service to educational needs throughout the country (Secretary of Public Education, 2006). But the process of supporting special education in the country's entities has been slow, for example, "in the 90s the states of Colima, Chiapas, Chihuahua, Guanajuato, Michoacán, Morelos and Tlaxcala" (Curriculum, 2004, p. 20), did not have in any regular school of bachelor's degree in special education.

In Chiapas, the teacher training in special education began in 2004, offered by Escuela Normal Fray Matías de Córdova, located in Tapachula of Córdova and Ordóñez; Chiapas, and in 2007 in the Bachelor school in Primary education of the State, located in Tuxtla Gutiérrez. Therefore, the attention to the student population with special educational needs before offering the degree in special education in

normal schools was assisted by graduates of the degrees of primary education, preschool, graduates in special education trained in other entities, psychologists, among others.

The special education degree is offered in the normal schools of the country, and they attend the plan and study program established by the Ministry of Public Education. It is the only institution empowered by the article third constitutional to determine the plans and programs of study for the teacher training of basic education (Political Constitution of the United Mexican States, 2016).

The approaches of the National Development Plan (2013) were reviewed to problematize the study of teacher training in special education, these were: the Sector Education Program (2013), the General Law of Education (2013), among others. However, teacher training for special education has been investigated. In this case, were explored the approaches of Sánchez-Palomino (2007), Fariás-Martínez and Ramírez-Montoya (2010), Gallego-Ortega and Rodríguez-Fuentes (2007) and Tenorio (2011), who from their own viewpoints to address initial teacher training and attention to special educational needs to deepen the questioning of the formative process of the students who participated in this research.

Likewise, the development of academic skills in the student to attend the academic content was also analyzed, since the objective is to provide them knowledge that differentiates from other disciplinary fields, in a way that those involved keep it or modify it; therefore, the belonging of the group, in this case the school, ensures the defense of the interests of its members (Bourdieu, 2009). In this case, the student, depending on his/her study habits handles implicitly or explicitly the implications of the



formation, since “the exercise, practice and automation of the skills are important for the students, especially for those with learning difficulties” (Torres, Tolosa, Urrea and Monsalve, 2009); however, these actions imply that the professor knows the study habits of the students to implement the didactic strategies that favor learning (Escalante, Escalante, Linzaga and Merlos, 2008).

Escalante, Escalante, Linzaga and Merlos (2008) mentioned that it is necessary that the professor knows the student’s study habits in order to cause academic success in him/her; this is agreed to Álvarez, Silió and Fernández (2012), who emphasized that planning, collaboration and innovation are key pieces to achieve good educational practice, because it provokes questions and confrontation of the implicit knowledge, exploring the experiences of the students. In this regard Chirinos and Padrón (2010) argued that the teaching practice is linked to the commitment of the student to learn, but the professor is the one that has to motivate him/her for its achievement, seeking with it the confrontation to the different realities of the students in a committed way; the teaching strategies must be aimed at achieving fairness and justice in the educative process.

The previous contextualization problematized the academic formation of the students of the degree in special education at Escuela Normal Fray Matías de Córdoba. The research questions posed were: what are the study habits of the students who course the degree and what do they think of the teaching practice of the professors who educate them? Aiming at analyzing the study habits they possess and the opinion they have of the teaching practice of their professors, and having this hypothesis: students’ study habits are in synergy with teachers’ teaching practices that educate them.

## 2. Methodology

The study was carried out with students of the degree in special education at Escuela Normal Fray Matías de Córdoba, located in Tapachula of Cordova and Ordóñez, Chiapas; enrolled in the

semester corresponding to August 2015-January 2016. 101 students out of 104 were selected, composing the school enrolment at that time: 29 students in the first semester; 22 students in the third semester; 27 students in the fifth semester; 26 students in the seventh semester. It should be said that this degree is offered annually in the morning shift, so the beginning of the semester is not offered in August. The research is descriptive transversal (Bericat, 1998; Campos, 2014; Ortiz and García, 2016). The permission of the director was obtained to enter the school.

A questionnaire was applied to obtain information; the time spent was three hours. Four days were used, one day for each semester (first, third, fifth and seventh); the first hours of the day were used — 45 minutes with each group — in order to avoid fatigue in the students.

The questionnaire was applied as a census, thus, the only criterion that considered the non-probabilistic choice of the sample was that the student be enrolled in that period. The questionnaire was designed by the authors according to the objectives and the hypothesis of the investigation, considering the following categories: general data; socio-economic data; main source of information; place to perform homework; notes requested by professors; teacher didactic strategy; work corrections and comments; evaluation criteria used.

The data obtained from the questionnaire were introduced to the statistical program SPSS, in which they were ordered and codified. A frequency analysis was created with the database.

## 3. Results

In the semester from August 2015 to January 2016, 104 students were enrolled in the special education degree. At the time of applying the questionnaire, three students were not present, so only the response of 101 students was shown.

Regarding the number of students who were studying the degree, 79.2% were women and 20.8% were men, from 18 to 23 years old. 29.7% were 21 years old (see table 1).



Table 1. Age of students coursing the special education degree in the semester from August 2015-January 2016

Age	Frequency	Total %
18	19	18.8
19	19	18.8
20	20	19.8
21	30	29.7
22	12	11.9
23	1	1.0
Total	101	100.0

When students were asked about the main source of information they consult, they commented that it is the anthology proposed by the plan and study program (see table 2).

Table 2. Main source of information used by the students of the degree in special education for the academic training

Source of information	Did not answer	Always	Almost always	Almost never	Never	Total %
Anthology	0,0	79,2	18,8	1,0	1,0	100
Bibliography of the program	2,0	33,7	39,6	21,8	3,0	100
Bibliography that the student consulted by his/her own	1,0	25,7	46,5	25,7	1,0	100

Source: own elaboration

The table shows that the anthology that establishes the study program is the main source of information of the students: 79.2% answered that they always consult it and 18.8% almost always. The following are the complementary bibliographies established by the study program (33.7%) and the bibliography they consult by their own (25.7%).

By asking students about the places where they perform their academic homework, it was found that the main place is the house, 94% students in total — including always and almost always — answered this, followed by the classroom and finally the library (see table 3).

Table 3. Places where the students of special education do their homework

Place	Did not answer	Always	Almost always	Almost never	Never	Total %
House	1,0	87,1	6,9	1,0	4,0	100
Classroom	6,9	31,7	40,6	14,9	5,9	100
Library	5,9	7,9	36,6	43,6	5,9	100

Source: own elaboration

The anthology is full of theory, which serves the purpose of each individual for initiating the teacher training. Based on this and in the process of analyzing how students appropriate the information posed by the theory they read,

a question was raised, what are the main reading controls that professors request? (table 4).



Table 4. Note styles that professors ask the student of the special education degree after having read

Notes	Did not answer	Yes	No	Total %
Summaries	1,0	94,1	5,0	100
Diagrams	5,9	59,4	34,7	100
Schemes	3,0	79,2	17,8	100
Questionnaires	6,9	53,5	39,6	100
Notes	7,9	61,4	30,7	100
Highlighting	0,0	100	0,0	100

Source: own elaboration

The information presented in the table shows two questions, that the main activity that the student does in the reading is to underline: 100% of students mentioned it, followed by the elaboration of summaries (94.1%) and schemes (79.2%). These appropriation activities of academic content in the students allow inferring that after reading—the underlining is immersed

in the reading process— ideas are presented through a reading control.

Students were also asked to question the main didactic strategies that professors have to teach them, the items were: lectures by the professor, dictation, group dynamics, presentation by students, intervention of students in class, and questions asked by the professor (see table 5).

Table 5. Main didactic strategy occupied by the professors in the teaching process of students coursing the degree in special education

Didactic strategy	Did not answer	Always	Almost always	Almost never	Never	Total%
Lecture by the professor	0,0	24,8	48,5	6,9	19,8	100
Dictation	1,0	5,0	23,8	37,6	32,7	100
Group dynamics	0,0	48,5	45,5	2,0	4,0	100
Presentation by the students	0,0	75,2	22,8	1,0	1,0	100
Student intervention in the class	1,0	53,5	38,6	5,0	2,0	100
Questions asked by the professor	0,0	74,3	24,8	0,0	1,0	100

Source: own elaboration

The results shown on the table states that the main didactic activity of the professor is that the students present a lecture in the class (75.2%), followed by the questioning of the professor towards them (74.3%), and the intervention—participation— of the student using the theoretical and/or empirical content of the reading he or she is analyzing. This allows recognizing that the teaching practice of the professor training considers the anthology as the main tool of work. In table 2, it was shown that

the student indicated the anthology as the main study source.

Another element that was considered was the review of the academic activities requested—homework— and the students were asked if the teachers returned the homework with corrections and comments. In this case, 39.6% of students mentioned that they always do it and 34.7% that they almost always return the academic papers requested with corrections and comments. However, 24.8% of students said that professors almost never return the work they



requested, and only 1% say they never give back the homework.

Likewise, regarding the teaching practices experienced by the students, they were asked about the presentation of the study program and the agreed forms of evaluation that professors have: 71.3% said that at the beginning of the semester the professors always present the program, and 74.3% mentioned that they always respect the agreed evaluations.

In relation to the latter, students were questioned about the criteria used by professors for the assignment of qualifications, the following items were considered: written examination, oral examination, reading controls, work, participation in class, attendance, punctuality, behavior, individual presentation, group presentation, plans and models, field practice, self-assessment, collective evaluation (see table 6).

Table 6. Main criteria that professors set students to pass the subject

Always	Almost always	Almost never	Never	Did not answer	Total %	Total %
Written exam	90,1	7,9	1,0	0,0	1,0	100
Oral exam	22,8	20,8	36,6	16,8	3,0	100
Reading control	68,3	17,8	5,9	5,0	3,0	100
Works	84,2	11,9	2,0	0,0	2,0	100
Participation in the class	86,1	11,9	1,0	0,0	1,0	100
Attendance	70,3	18,8	5,9	3,0	2,0	100
Punctuality	61,4	25,7	7,9	2,0	3,0	100
Behavior	34,7	39,6	14,9	6,9	4,0	100
Individual presentation	76,2	19,8	2,0	0,0	2,0	100
Group presentation	78,2	17,8	3,0	0,0	1,0	100
Mockups	30,7	45,5	18,8	3,0	2,0	100
Field practice	72,3	19,8	4,0	3,0	1,0	100
Self-evaluation	40,6	29,7	20,8	5,9	3,0	100
Group evaluation	36,6	28,7	21,8	8,9	4,0	100

Source: own elaboration

The information presented in the table shows that the less considered activities by the professors to grade students are: oral exam (22.8%), behavior (34.7%), mockups (30.7%), self-evaluation (40.6%) and collective evaluation (36.6%). This situation can be analyzed as: a) the professor considers he/she to have more criteria at the time of assigning a grade; b) that self-assessment and collective evaluation is not yet solid in the formation of students. Instead are prioritized the criteria for written exam (90.1%), participation in class (86.1%) and works assigned (84.2%). Even though students carry out field

practice — observation and teaching practice days— those are not the activities that make up the main graded activities.

#### 4. Discussion of the results

The discussion of results focuses on the analysis of the opinion that students have about their study habits and the teaching practice of their professors. It is shown how the study habit largely relies on the teaching practice of their professors. Nevertheless, the teaching practice refers to all the didactic activities of the professor so that



the student internalizes all the school contents established in the curriculum.

#### 4.1. Study habits

Students' study habits adhere to the institutional guidelines set in the Constitutional Third article (Constitution of the United Mexican States, 2016) for schools, given that the Federal executive molds the plans and study programs. 79.2% of the students responded that they use as their main teaching source in special education the anthology of each subject of the study plan.

Anthology, as the main reading source in the students, allowed considering Bourdieu and Passeron (1996) approach when saying that the students are condemned to receive the vision of the university world; teachers are explicitly subjected to the plan and study program. The student is formed to respond to the approach of national education policy from a homogeneous perspective, omitting the diversity that surrounds the daily life of students in special education at Escuela Normal. The student is imposed adequate knowledge to the objective relationships of the academic world (Bourdieu, 2009).

By asking students about the places where they do the activities — homework— that the teachers program to reinforce the content, 87.1% mentioned the house, followed by the classroom, 31.7% states always and 40.6% almost always. The data show that the classroom is the space where common knowledge is confronted with the specialized knowledge of vocational training. The library, which should be the space where this knowledge is strengthened, is minimized by the students, since according to the results 7.9% always occupies the library to do homework and 36.6% that almost always uses it.

The three locations: house, classroom, and library allow deducing that the academic activities —homework— of the students focus on the anthology they study of each subject. This situation allows asking the following question, how do

the professors generate equity and justice in the teaching process in the students of the degree in special education, (Chirinos and Padrón, 2010)? Based on Barbosa and Moura (2013) about the knowledge management from work projects, it is questioned how each professor creates the didactic activities so the student would be immersed and involved with the subject content?

Thus, since students' study habits rely in the house and in the classroom, these have high symbolic capital value (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1996). The classroom is the space to learn specialized knowledge and the house the location to reinforce it through homework. Conducting academic activities in the house and in the classroom proves that there is no training for the use of the library. Internet, on its extensive use in the daily life of students of Escuela Normal, could be the main factor that reduces the time to search for information, time that is longer in the library; however, it is only a hypothesis, since the fluctuating world of information does not guarantee that the student internalizes the academic knowledge that is in internet.

The study habit in students generates other questions, what is special education training? And how do students conceive it? Questions that have not been answered since another study must be carried out. However, the panorama that shows their study habits allows considering that there is the concern on the formation, but it is limited to the anthology. Although it is stated in the curriculum (2004) the idea that the student to graduate needs to have the following intellectual ability:

The graduated student must have the commitment, capacities and attitudes for the scientific research: curiosity, creativity, observation capacity, ability to ask methodological questions and prove answers, ability to register, systematize and interpret information; critical reflection on the teaching practice, and apply these capacities and attitudes to improve the results of the teaching process (Plan de Estudios, 2004, p.45).



The approach of the graduated profile seeks a special education professional with intellectual skills on scientific research, which is a forceful positioning if the teaching profession is considered to be related to theory-practice. However, other questions are asked based on the study habits presented in this research, what theoretical and methodological elements are valued and included in the academic essays that the student performs after the observation days and teaching practice in each semester? The previous questioning relates to the learning skills that the student uses when reading an academic text. 94.1% of the students argued that they summarize, and 79.2% do schemes.

Students have been generating academic knowledge from the school demands established by each professor. However, the action of the professor carries symbolic violence as mentioned by Bourdieu and Passeron (1996), when referring that construction of knowledge where the student shows dedication refers to the belief of the knowledge that is formed, since “the belief constitutes belonging to a field” (Bourdieu, 2007, p. 109), in this case, the commitment, time, dedication among others that the student invests to construct knowledge (Sennett, 2008), in which he/she deconstruct the common knowledge provided by the environment and immerses in order to become academic knowledge (Charlot, 2008). It is recognized that students in this process of constructing academic knowledge develop skills, capacities and attitudes to exercise the profession.

Constructing knowledge is to assume that “schools need to be able to respond to the needs of young people and to provide them a safe environment to learn and succeed” (Day, 2005, p. 243). Thus, the professors provide the students with tools to “get information, respond to it and actively participate on its production” (Day, 2005, p. 249). It is necessary—for another study—to investigate the reflection and research that the professor generates from his/her own teaching process.

## 4.2. Teaching practice of professors

The student coursing the degree on special education has an opinion of the teaching practice of the professor. Based on this approach, the opinions were analyzed: didactic strategy, work review, assignment of qualifications.

Regarding the teaching strategies used by the professor to present the class, 75.2% of the students indicated that the class is centered in presentations, followed by questions (74.3%). This provides an approximation to the dialogue in the construction of knowledge. However, such construction is limited to the offering of a plan and study program. Even though there is a dialectic approach by the professor in recognizing what the student has learned, it is monitored as established in the program.

The student presents the theoretical part in the classroom and the professor reinforces that knowledge with questions to invite the reflection, and to think beyond common sense. There is a knowledge management, which aims to educate professors. In this regard, Tardif (2004) mentions that initial teacher training aims to habituating students to professional practice and make them practical reflective.

Nevertheless, since the presentation of the student in class and the teaching intervention are the main didactic strategies for the formation of specialized knowledge, it is inferred that part of these practices are being transferred by the students to the days of observation and teaching practice; therefore, How are the students doing the days of observation and teaching practice? Do they repeat the teaching examples practiced by their professors?.

As for the review of homework, 24.8% argued that professors almost never return homework, this led to the following questions: What are those corrections that professor return to 39.6% of students who pointed out that teachers return work with corrections and comments? Does the student pay attention to the comments?, what academic content do teachers



evaluate as priority aspects to improve the school homework requested?

Professors' action to return homework with comments to students is considered favorable for learning. The student learns from his/her mistakes. In the case of these students with the observations done by the professors, what is academically strengthened for the presentation of the academic essays? The educational performance that the student observes in class affects him/her when teaching, since the teaching example is decisive in the training, because "the professors, like other professionals, elaborate frameworks of reference that provide order and continuity to their work and allow them to confront and overcome the daily demands" (Day, 2005, p. 11). With these bases, the student assumes himself/herself as a professional of special education; according to Barrón-Tirado and Pontón-Ramos (2013), the pedagogical training at Escuela Normal is above the disciplinary knowledge.

Nevertheless, presenting the course as mentioned by 71.3% of the students and respecting the evaluation norms agreed as stated by 74.3%, the student is formed with the commitment of teaching. In such a commitment converges a homogenization of teaching approaches, which can be imitated by the student at the time of conducting the observation days and teaching practices. In this sense, presenting the program and agreeing on ways to evaluate are common techniques used by the professor

Educating for educate is to take on the commitment that the professor will meet the study program, regardless the school level that is attended. In the case of special education formation, students have understood that teachers should mention the rules of the course at the beginning of the semester. The rituals found in the professor teaching practice will produce an echo in the student; as mentioned by Jackson, "a final aspect of the stability experienced by young students is the ritualistic and cyclical quality of the activities carried out in the classroom" (1996,

p. 48). It is then recognized that the examples will shape the life of each of those studying.

Finally, grading is an element that permeates in the learning process of the students; 90.1% mentioned that the written exam is the main tool used by the professors to assign a grade, followed by participation in the class with 86.1% and works with 84.2%. About the way how the professors assign the grade, the analysis obtained is that the students are not used to self-evaluation or collective evaluation. From the information provided, it is considered that there is a double discourse of the evaluation, on the one hand, the study plan (2004) for the professor training in special education alludes to the self-evaluation, in which the student recognizes his/her achievements in the formative process; on the other hand, there is the fact that the written evaluation is the main tool to analyze the knowledge acquired by the student in the semester.

Deepening in the evaluation for the assignment of a grade, these teaching practices are somehow coherent since students who graduate from Escuela Normal will undergo an admission test to the professional teaching service (General Law of Professional Teaching Service, 2013). From these practices it is argued that the school discriminates who will and who will not be part of the Mexican education system.

Student grading is accentuated in the school. Even though this practice may be disconnected with the theoretical positions that review what the evaluation is, is the one that best fits in the memory of each student. In this case, the fact that the students assign the priority by the written examination shows that it is the most usual teaching practice to obtain a knowledge parameter regarding the specialization in the profession.

The written exam subjects students and professors on what to learn, how to do it and what needs to be answered. It limits the autonomy of the professor in the educative process (Contreras, 1997). In such a way that it is prepared to respond the parameters that the educational system considers as ideals.



## 5. Conclusions

Study habits of the students coursing the degree in special education and the opinion they have of the teaching practice of their professors were analyzed in this paper. According to the results obtained, it is known that the main concern that teachers have towards them is that they have time to teach the theory that arises in the anthologies of each subject that has been established by the educational system. Hence, the study habits that students have include the summary and the diagrams as essential techniques to cover the contents of a reading; at the same time, home is where they are to organize their ideas to work on each subject. Based on this organization of systematized ideas, students do their academic works requested by the professor and participate individually or in groups in the class. At the same time, the academic knowledge they construct in the semester will be demonstrated through a written exam.

Thus, the study habits of these students cultivate the knowledge to respond to what is asked. The teaching practices of the professors are based to attend the purposes of the academic program. In this case, the teaching practice that the students have used from their professors is that the class must be framed in the content, using techniques as: participation in class, homework, group presentations, individual presentation and written exam; practices that professors perform daily at school, that is, a systematized teaching that is inherited to the student through the formative process. Teaching is made through the example.

Finally, it can be concluded that with those study habits the students have constructed their academic knowledge; and by observing the teaching practice of their professors they can comprehend how is it to be educated to become a professor of special education.

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