

Original article

## Mediation in the textual comprehension of students with autism spectrum disorder

La mediación en la  
comprensión textual de los  
educandos con trastorno del  
espectro de autismo

Mediação na compreensão  
textual de escolares com  
transtorno do espectro do  
autismo

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### ABSTRACT

To favor the process of comprehension of texts in students with autism spectrum disorder, it is necessary to start from the conception that every individual has the capacity to learn and develop in different fields, it is enough that the appropriate resources are used. In response to this problem, research is carried out that aims to argue particular ideas and points of view about the peculiar nature of the text comprehension process in the education of students with autism spectrum disorder, from a cultural-historical position, which claims of an organization that takes into account social and instrumental mediation. In its development, theoretical-level methods such as analytical-synthetic, induction-deduction, hypothetical-deductive, observation and interview were taken into account, as well as those corresponding to descriptive and inferential statistics that allowed collecting, interpreting and process the information related to the subject. It is also intended to assess the process of text comprehension from a socio-communicative perspective that favors the social inclusion of students with autism spectrum disorder.

**Keywords:** text comprehension; historical-cultural; instrumental mediation; social mediation; autism spectrum disorder.

### RESUMEN

Para favorecer el proceso de comprensión de textos en los educandos con trastorno del espectro de autismo, se debe partir de la concepción de que todo individuo tiene la capacidad para aprender y desarrollarse en diferentes ámbitos, basta con que se utilicen los recursos adecuados. Como respuesta a esta problemática se realiza la investigación que tiene como objetivo argumentar ideas y puntos de vista particulares sobre el carácter peculiar del proceso de comprensión de textos en la educación de educandos con trastorno del

espectro de autismo, desde una posición histórico cultural, que reclama de una organización que tenga en cuenta la mediación social e instrumental. En su desarrollo se tuvieron en cuenta métodos del nivel teórico como el analítico-sintético, inducción-deducción, hipotético-deductivo, del nivel empírico la observación y la entrevista, se utilizaron además los correspondientes a la estadística descriptiva e inferencial que permitieron recopilar, interpretar y procesar la información relacionada con la temática. Se pretende además valorar el proceso de comprensión textual desde una perspectiva socio comunicativa que favorece la inclusión social de los educandos con trastorno del espectro de autismo.

**Palabras Clave:** comprensión de textos; histórico-cultural; mediación instrumental; mediación social; trastorno del espectro de autismo.

## RESUMO

Para promover o processo de compreensão de textos em alunos com transtorno do espectro do autismo, devemos partir da concepção de que cada indivíduo tem capacidade de aprender e se desenvolver em diferentes áreas, bastando utilizar os recursos adequados. Em resposta a esse problema, são realizadas pesquisas que visam argumentar ideias e pontos de vista particulares sobre o caráter peculiar do processo de compreensão de textos na educação de alunos com transtorno do espectro do autismo, a partir de uma posição histórico-cultural, que exige de uma organização que leva em conta a mediação social e instrumental. No seu desenvolvimento foram levados em consideração métodos de nível teórico como analítico-sintético, indução-dedução, hipotético-dedutivo, observação de nível empírico e entrevista; também foram utilizados métodos correspondentes à estatística descritiva e inferencial, que permitiram coletar, interpretar e processar informações relacionadas ao tema. Pretende-se também avaliar o processo de compreensão textual numa perspectiva sociocomunicativa que favoreça a inclusão

social de alunos com perturbação do espectro do autismo.

**Palavras-chave:** compreensão de texto; histórico-cultural; mediação instrumental; mediação social; transtorno do espectro do autismo.

## INTRODUCTION

The process of textual comprehension has been addressed by different researchers, highlighting Roméu, (2007); Quintana, (2015); Choquichanca and Inga, (2020), and others, granting it extraordinary value, since the appropriation of the entire curriculum depends on it, also recognize the importance of adequate understanding so that communication occurs efficiently.

The teaching of reading and understanding texts must contribute to the development of communicative competence in students, and to do so it must be based on the cognitive, communicative and sociocultural approach of the Roméu language (2007), which has as its essential objective the development of the student's communicative competence, which must be able to develop from the earliest grades skills that favor the process of understanding and production of meanings in different linguistic and sociocultural contexts.

Comprehension is a complex and active sociocultural, communicative process, in which four fundamental elements interact: reader, text, author and context, which implies knowledge of the content, its interpretation and extrapolation.

The development of textual comprehension in learners with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) has been studied in the work of different authors at the international and national level, including Finnegan and Mazin, (2015), Aguiar, (2017, 2020). Rodríguez, (2018).

The difficulties in textual comprehension of students with ASD are very variable. There may be subtle difficulties in capturing the deep meaning of statements that imply double semiosis such as metaphors, ironies, sarcasms and proverbs. This need is usually limited, extremely literal, concrete and not very flexible, which explains how difficult it is for them to carry out the processes of analysis, synthesis, abstraction and generalization.

In this research, it is also considered that the student with ASD correctly decodes the text because he establishes the relationship between grapheme and sound. This is achieved thanks to its excellent visual memory, but it does not establish a relationship between the meaning of the words and their organization into phrases and more complex syntactic structures, forming meanings based on the communicative intention of the text. The fundamental cause is that the thought processes are affected. These processes can be compensated by using the potential they have to assimilate visual learning.

Students with ASD present symbolic learning, without errors, focused on details, with concrete and visible goals that give meaning to the task from the beginning, so obtaining global information facilitates the understanding of its meaning based on the association. word-image, so the teacher must take advantage of this potential by using images or pictograms as a system that allows the understanding of the word and the text based on its own code. These can reach up to the third level of understanding, always taking into account the variability in their development.

The first level of textual understanding in first cycle learners with ASD is achieved when they are able to identify the general idea that summarizes the meaning of the text and some key references. The second level, when they are able to comment in a simple way on the essential ideas of the text and show with words, gestures, their like or dislike for the characters and/or their actions.

The third level is reached when they simply transfer the information or learning they obtain to the social context where they interact, in a way that facilitates the understanding of the social environment through the use of appropriate behaviors that allow them to interact socially.

In correspondence with the previous ideas, it is considered that students with ASD have special educational needs in the process of textual comprehension. Therefore, it is necessary that the teacher, as the main mediator, direct the educational process towards the following aspects:

- Integrate updated information that promotes the maintenance and enrichment of teaching strategies for the development of textual understanding from the Spanish Language subject with support for increasingly inclusive practices.
- Offer an equal educational response to the inclusion of students with ASD in different contexts.
- Incorporate into educational practice the results of research carried out aimed at textual understanding from the Spanish Language with its corresponding adaptations for working with students who have ASD.
- Make maximum use of the strengths of the school, family and community context for the conception and development of textual understanding in these students.

In response to these situations, this work is prepared, which aims to argue particular ideas and points of view about the peculiar nature of the text comprehension process in the education of students with autism spectrum disorder, from a historical-cultural position. that demands an organization that takes into account social and instrumental mediation.

## MATERIAL AND METHOD

To carry out the diagnostic study, 6 municipalities in the Pinar del Río province were selected (Pinar del Río, Consolación del Sur, Los Palacios, Sandino, Viñales and San Luis). A total of 14 students from the first cycle with ASD who receive the Spanish Language subject were selected, in addition to the 13 teachers who teach it.

In carrying out this study, the materialist dialectic was assumed as a general method, which allowed the analysis of the phenomenon under study, its historicity, multifactorial, multidimensionality, concatenated with other facts and phenomena in its constant transformation and development, supported by theoretical methods such as the historical-logical one that allowed us to analyze, evaluate and take positions in relation to the historical evolution of the textual comprehension process of students with ASD. The analytical-synthetic and inductive-deductive were used throughout the research process, from the bibliographic search to the proposal evaluation process. Furthermore, the hypothetico-deductive method was used in the analysis of scientific theories related to the object of study, which made possible the systematization of scientific knowledge.

Empirical methods were used that made it possible to characterize the state of the textual comprehension process in students with ASD, the object of the investigation. The documentary analysis facilitated the recording of data about the work carried out for the development of the textual comprehension process from the Spanish Language subject through the review of documents; in this case the analysis of the study plans and programs of the Spanish Language subject, sources of work of teachers and students within which were psycho-pedagogical files, lesson plans and notebooks of the students.

Observation of classes to verify the didactic and methodological treatment provided to the process of textual comprehension in students of the first cycle with ASD, from

the Spanish Language subject. The interview carried out with teachers and directors to obtain information about the methodological didactic treatment of the textual comprehension process in the students of the first cycle with ASD, from the Spanish Language subject and the pedagogical tests were applied to verify the performance of the students with ASD. in the development of learning tasks related to text comprehension.

## RESULTS

The educational care provided to students with ASD has important achievements; However, insufficiencies are revealed in the process of textual understanding from the Spanish Language that limit the fulfillment of the purpose and objectives of this education, in correspondence with the aspired purposes. Consequently, it became necessary to carry out a diagnostic study of the process of textual comprehension from the Spanish Language in students with ASD, which allowed us to offer a comprehensive vision of their current state.

The historical study of the textual comprehension process of students with ASD revealed how the assessment of the need to perfect the textual comprehension process to achieve preparation for the social life of these students evolved from one stage to the next and that the Scientific thought moved from segregationist positions to more humanistic positions with respect to the potential of this student, as well as the recognition of the importance of the process of textual comprehension, which is currently associated with the possibilities of access to general education for students. with ASD.

In the observation of classes, insufficiencies are observed in the mastery of the method, where 95% of the teachers fail to adapt the comprehension tasks based on the variability in the student's development levels (manifesting difficulties in providing such attention based on the diagnosis).

79.1% of teachers promote very little the development of learning tasks in which the student has a leading role, the student assumes a passive attitude towards learning, the teacher continues to be the protagonist of the process and does not develop learning tasks that serve as a model for the student to use it in the contexts where he interacts. Furthermore, the poor use of procedures characterized by flexibility in order to guarantee the solution of comprehension tasks was confirmed, with the formal and traditional class predominating (100%).

90% of the teachers interviewed when analyzing the textual comprehension process refer to insufficiencies in the mastery of didactic categories for the textual comprehension process from the Spanish Language subject. 85% consider the potential that students have for the textual comprehension process as they go through the cycle, however, they agree in pointing out the difficulties in moving through the levels of textual comprehension.

The study allowed us to relate the main regularities of the textual comprehension process of students with ASD.

1. The use of social and instrumental mediations to address comprehension tasks is insufficient; furthermore, there is little time and flexibility that the Spanish Language class provides for this purpose.
2. The exercise of the logical steps through which they must go to achieve the three levels of understanding is insufficient, based on the variability in the development of these students.
3. The variety of teaching resources that take into account the use of visual learning as the potential of these learners is insufficient.
4. The use of learning tasks that respond to the variability in the development of these learners is insufficient.

From these results, didactic suggestions were prepared for the teacher with the objective of offering guiding guidelines, structured recommendations and facilitating the appropriate means for solving the difficulties presented in the process of textual comprehension from a historical-cultural conception by taking into account the role of social and instrumental mediation in the didactic conception of the Spanish Language subject.

*Ideas and points of view on the peculiar nature of the text comprehension process in the education of students with autism spectrum disorder.*

The mediated nature of psychic processes highlights the social nature of the internalization process, given as a psychological mechanism in appropriation, by pointing out the decisive role of the adult as a mediator in the subject-object relationship and bearer of the most general forms of historical experience. -cultural, contained in the objects of the subject's surrounding reality. Adults and instruments, according to Vygotski, (1997), act as mediators of the knowledge process.

According to Vygotsky (1997), there are two forms of mediation: the influence of the socio-historical context (adults, peers, organized activities, etc.) and the sociocultural instruments used by the subject (tools and signs). According to Vygotski (1997), social mediation refers to the use of other people or social groups in the integration of the subject into social practices, that is, the role of the other in the formation of individual consciousness.

The student with ASD has special characteristics in his development; presents a symbolic, routine learning, focused on details, this means that the process of understanding texts becomes more complex, depending, above all, on the characteristics of the text: graphic, lexical, contextual, extension since these learners do not they manage to guide the understanding of the text relying on learned strategies, they do not easily determine the essential objective of their

reading, frequently becoming demotivated, they do not use previous knowledge or relate it to the new information that the text provides, to achieve the internalization of the message and its return in simple assessments and modes of action.

If the above is taken into account, the process of textual comprehension in students with ASD must be mediated by: the teacher, the group and the family. It is with the teacher, the group and within this the family, with whom the student commonly interacts in his social relationships, with whom he shares his most important daily activities, especially study and play.

The teacher has a scientific and methodological preparation with a humanistic, differentiated, corrective-compensatory, preventive and development-stimulating approach, which allows him as the main mediator to motivate, guide, stimulate the learning processes and facilitate the didactic resources necessary for the teacher. Educating with ASD understands various types of texts in different contexts. In his lectures, Riviere expressed the need to use a logical cognitive path with this student, not a social cognitive one, to be able to process and resolve everyday situations (Verdugo, *et al.*, 2021).

But not only the teacher is an adult mediator in the process of textual comprehension of the student with ASD, parents and other educational agents in the community must learn to use generalized supports so that their children have a more active social participation in the family context and community.

In the educational field, the study of groups has gained great connotation. Among the main authors who have ventured into this topic, the following stand out: Calviño, (2005); Castellanos, (2014) and others, who made contributions to group dynamics, addressing aspects such as interaction, cohesion and group goal. The cohesion of the group allows us to understand whether or not there is internalization of the group task. The more

united the group is in terms of the way of thinking, feeling and acting, it will denote unity and cohesion, which influences the establishment of common objectives and goals for each of its members, giving rise to the group goal.

In the process of textual understanding of students with ASD, the school group is a space for cooperation and permanent socialization, and by interacting in this process, it promotes the result of the support, based on the imitative behaviors of the student with ASD, which stimulates with their ideas, knowledge and experience, contributes to the development of social and communicative relationships, producing cooperative and reciprocal learning.

Social mediation has positive effects for the achievement of textual understanding despite the fact that the authors agree on the need for its socialization. In a study developed by González, Vásquez and Hernández, (2019) they identified the lack of social interaction as the most frequent cause of consultation. Deficits in social-emotional reciprocity vary, e.g., from abnormal social approach and failure of normal two-way conversation, to decline in shared interests, emotions or affections, to failure to initiate or respond to social interactions. Deficits in the development, maintenance and understanding of relationships range, for example, from difficulties adjusting behavior in various social contexts, to difficulties sharing imaginative play or making friends, to a lack of interest in other people.

According to the Vygotskian conception, instrumental mediation is associated with the use of drawings, marks, language, schemes, etc., which are mediating instruments created by man. In it, tools and signs must be differentiated. Tools are the instruments created by culture that men use in actions to transform reality. Signs represent systems of different levels of complexity that link the subject's psyche and make the transmission of meanings possible.

Signs enable the regulation of social life and the self-regulation of one's own activity. For Vygotsky (1997) the sign is any stimulus artificially created by man in the psychological situation, which becomes a vehicle for the mastery of one's own or another's behavior and which fulfills the function of self-stimulation.

Structured teaching (Ruiz and Navarra, 2020) proposed by researchers from the Teacch division (Treatment and Education of Autistic related Communication Handicapped Children) and understood as a way of adapting educational practice to the different ways of understanding, thinking and learning of people with ASD, has four fundamental components and in this research, they are assumed as instrumental mediating elements for the comprehension of texts in first cycle learners with ASD. They are: the physical structure of the environment, visual agendas, work systems or structured routines, and visual structure and information.

Among them, the agendas visually indicate the order of the activities to be carried out during the day and/or during class, which makes it easier to better understand the environment by providing order, predictability and organization. The agendas offer comfortable and predictable routines for students with ASD when they have to move from one activity to another. Their use within the framework of the textual comprehension process acts as a mediator, helping them to regulate their activity, to have greater control over themselves and the context in which they operate.

In this research, it is considered that structured routines constitute another instrumental mediator that can be used in the understanding process, by using visual and/or graphic representations that symbolize the different actions or steps that make up the activity, so that learners take awareness of the actions that comprise it and can use them as a guide to learn to understand texts in different contexts. These ideas are presented in coherence with Choquichanca and Inga

(2020), who suggest establishing connections between the text and one's own life. These authors recommend evoking sensory images of what is being read, but without losing the thread or understanding of what is to follow.

According to the previous ideas, social and instrumental mediation is essential to develop the process of textual comprehension in first-cycle students with ASD, approached from positions of collaboration, mutual learning, development of social communication, from a historical perspective. cultural; since it promotes the materialization of the unity of the affective and the cognitive, perfects the pedagogical process, stimulates the creativity of teachers and therefore raises quality.

The comprehension of texts in students of the first cycle constitutes an essential objective, not only of Spanish Language, but of all subjects, since it is considered an irreplaceable way for the acquisition of knowledge and its subsequent application. According to the development of the text comprehension process that the student achieves, the effectiveness of his or her learning also depends, since, as a process inherent to all activities, it runs transversally throughout the curriculum; however, the greatest weight in the development of understanding of texts is still achieved by the Spanish Language subject. (Knight,2002)

Sales, (2004) highlights the priority that the teaching of the Spanish Language has received from the first moments of development and especially in the first cycle of Primary Education, where transcendent events take place, such as the learning of the written language and the increasingly growing skills in oral language management, to name a few. The knowledge system of the subject is linked to the components: reading and its comprehension, spelling, grammar, calligraphy and text construction. It is important to pay attention to the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing (Cassany, 2006).

The development of the textual comprehension process in the education of first cycle students with ASD, from the Spanish Language subject, is based on the application of the basic curriculum of Primary Education, with adjustments to the didactic components. This adaptation must take into account the variability of development and the heterogeneity of ASD, so the teaching categories must be adapted so that the teaching staff stimulates in this group of schoolchildren the possibility of learning to be and learning to live together, in the framework of social relations (Aguiar, Mainegra and García 2020).

The Spanish Language subject allows the development of skills that will serve the student with ASD throughout their life, which highlights the analysis, understanding and production of texts that must be expanded in each grade, where textual understanding is vital. importance to compensate for the difficulties that students with ASD present in social communication and within this, receptive language, an aspect that must be stimulated from an early age, in order to achieve adequate social interactions, which are essential for their preparation for life. social.

## DISCUSSION

In the world, behavioral interventions based mainly on the principles of behavior modification or applied behavioral analysis prevail for the care of students with ASD. On the other hand, development-based programs are characterized by being poorly structured. There are also interventions that are between these two poles (Rojas, Riverab and Niloc, 2019). This research focuses on a comprehensive vision of the development of the student with ASD, where the uniqueness of the cognitive, communicative and learning processes is considered.

The results obtained with the application of the exposed methods and the search for bibliographies on the subject show the need to delve deeper into it, due to the

importance of the role of social and instrumental mediation for the development of textual understanding in students with ASD. in contrast to the various ways of manifesting and the prevalence of a fundamentally clinical diagnosis (Velarde, Ignacio & Cárdenas, 2021).

The analyzes carried out allowed us to recognize the importance of the contributions of the historical-cultural approach of Vygostki, collaborators and followers, for the development of the text comprehension process in the students of the first cycle with ASD, from the Spanish Language subject, since they encourage this the student is able to understand different types of texts to face everyday life situations, which contributes to his or her preparation for social life. When the activities proposed are mediated by play, recreation and technology in correspondence with the variability of this student's development, a continuous improvement in the levels of textual understanding is evident. Márquez (2020) proposes cooperative - group work accompanied by recreational - recreational activities to promote textual understanding.

The process of textual comprehension is granted, by many researchers of the subject, an extraordinary value, since the appropriation of the entire curriculum depends on it, they also recognize the importance of adequate understanding so that communication occurs efficiently. The proposal makes it possible to develop textual understanding in ASD from its strengths, where the intervention focuses on promoting satisfactory and humanly significant internal experiences from a framework of values, as proposed by Tamarit (2020), which emphasizes intervening from an evidence-based practice. and in the deep understanding of the disorder to rethink the necessary support services and the role of the professional.

In May 2013, the DSM-V, the fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, was published,



establishing that autism disorder becomes the only possible diagnosis of PDD and is now called "spectrum disorder." of autism" (ASD), with the exception of Rett Disorder, which is understood as a reality different from the universe of autism, and in addition, the comprehensive evaluation of the student from the different contexts where it develops is of great relevance: school, family, and community.

Demósthene (2020) recognizes the potential of these students for learning using their adequate visual perception and mechanical associative memory, in addition, they assert the importance of educational actions on a continuous basis and for life. Celis and Ochoa (2022) insist that a fundamental primary goal is to focus attention on the relationship between their internal world and look for possibilities of relationship with the outside world, achieving a language that helps carry out the basic activities implemented in daily life.

In this research, it is considered that autism spectrum disorder is a developmental disorder that appears in early childhood, which is first complicated by its variability, expressed in the levels of development of social communication and behavior, and secondly because of its heterogeneity that is evident from the potential and needs of each individual, susceptible to being compensated by appropriate educational actions in different contexts, and that favor preparation for social life. (Aguiar, Mainegra and García, 2020).

The difficulties in textual comprehension of students with ASD are very variable in correspondence with the development of thinking. The above makes it possible to consider that the student with ASD correctly decodes the text because it establishes the relationship between grapheme and sound given the characteristics of his visual memory, which constitutes a potentiality in this student, but does not establish a relationship between the meaning of the words and their organization in phrases and more complex syntactic structures, forming

meanings based on the communicative intention of the text. It is this dichotomy that marks fertile ground for social and instrumental mediation to play a determining role in achieving textual understanding.

Students with ASD present symbolic learning, without errors, focused on details, with concrete and visible goals that give meaning to the task from the beginning, so obtaining global information facilitates the understanding of its meaning based on the association. word-image. Taking advantage of this potential by the teacher shows the need to use images or pictograms as a system that allows the understanding of the word and the text based on its own code.

The above ideas contribute a peculiar character to the process of understanding texts in the education of students with ASD, which calls for an organization in which the communicative functions of receptive language are stimulated in the historical-cultural context, with the use of resources and supports. that each first cycle student with ASD requires.

With an optimistic nature of development, Celis and Ochoa (2022) point out that each communication and sociability deficit will have a different form of resolution and a variable degree of method. The results obtained show that within the controversial space occupied by the process of textual comprehension from the Spanish Language subject, there is the complexity of demands for educational transformation in the teaching of students with ASD where social and instrumental mediation plays an essential role.

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The authors participated in the design and writing of the article, in the search and analysis of the information contained in the consulted bibliography.

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