

# International Journal of Human Sciences Research

## SELECTIVE MUTISM: AN INTEGRATIVE LITERATURE REVIEW

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**Abstract:** This article presents an Integrative Literature Review on Selective Mutism in the last eleven years. It was chosen as an objective to synthesize results obtained in research on selective mutism in Brazil and Portugal. Selective Mutism (SM) is a disorder still little known by educators and school psychologists, which makes its diagnosis late and ends up impacting the child's learning and development, especially in the school and social context. Selective Mutism was classified as an Anxiety Disorder and is characterized by a lack of oral communication in certain environments, especially at school, and may even be confused with extreme shyness, thus causing a delay in diagnosis. As a way of mitigating the impacts caused by MS, ludotherapy is indicated, which, in addition to being applied as a treatment, also facilitates communication and socialization of children with MS. It is concluded that the study and research on this disorder is essential to promote adequate monitoring of the child, both by teachers and family members, and thus prevent greater impacts on the delay of the learning processes.

**Keywords:** Selective Mutism; Integrative Review; Learning Disability; Ludotherapy.

## INTRODUCTION

This article discusses a topic little studied by educators and school psychologists, as highlighted by Ribeiro (2013), which is Selective Mutism (SM). This disorder, as Silva (2017) exposes, qualifies as a childhood anxiety disorder whose main particularity is the lack of communication in certain social environments. Other authors, such as Ribeiro (2013), Melo (2016) and Figueiras (2017), also address Selective Mutism in their work. Ribeiro (2013) defends the use of ludic activity and ludotherapy to help the development of children with selective mutism. She also explains how playing is important in these

cases, highlighting the positive points of ludotherapy in the development of children with MS. Melo (2016) and Figueiras (2017), in turn, talk about Cognitive Behavioral Therapy and how it is effective in the intervention of Selective Mutism, in addition to highlighting playful activities and games in the treatment of SD.

In the school context, if a student presents characteristics of such a disorder, it is quite possible that the principal teacher will have difficulties in knowing how to deal with this context; in view of this, the following question arises: What strategies can the teacher adopt to mitigate the impact of selective mutism on the child's academic performance?

The initial hypothesis is that the teacher must resort to adapted games and games in which interactions with colleagues take place, and thus, lead students with Selective Mutism to develop precisely the social skill, which is the most affected area.

In order to answer this question, this research has the general objective of identifying elements that can soften the impact of MS on school development based on the results obtained in the integrative review. Specifically, the objective is to understand what selective mutism is, its characteristics, symptoms and treatments; in addition to synthesizing the results acquired in research on selective mutism in Brazil and Portugal and describing the impact on the learning processes of children with this disorder based on the collected data.

As a method, the integrative review was chosen, a method that is divided into six parts, namely: elaboration of the guiding question, search or sampling in the literature, data collection, critical analysis of the included studies, discussion of the results and presentation of the integrative review (SOUZA; SILVA; CARVALHO, 2010).

The relevance of this theme is justified

by the fact that it is a topic that is not very widespread among educators, and, as we could observe in an exploratory review on the subject, as Ribeiro (2013) and Candeias (2018) point out: it is a disorder that is little recognized, causing, in most cases, its diagnosis to be late, which compromises the child's learning and development. Therefore, it is considered necessary to address the issue by studying the existing bibliography, analyzing and encouraging discussions to open paths for new research in the area in question.

## **INTEGRATIVE REVIEW AS A METHOD**

The integrative review is a method that is divided into six parts, namely: elaboration of the guiding question, search or sampling in the literature, data collection, critical analysis of the included studies, discussion of the results and presentation of the integrative review (SOUZA et al, 2010).

As Souza et al. (2010) exposes, the first phase of the integrative review, the elaboration of the guiding question is the most important phase and must be clear and objective, because it is through it that the means by which the main question will be answered will be determined, leading to the collection of information. In this study, the guiding question is the central question of the research problem, that is: What strategies could the teacher adopt to soften the impact of selective mutism on the academic performance of the child?

In the second phase, search and sampling in the literature, research is carried out in books, databases and journals, then including all the studies found or a random selection of articles, always following one or more criteria related to the first phase.

The research procedures adopted for the selection and choice of articles had as a first step the definition of descriptors. In the Open Access Scientific Repository of Portugal

(RCAAP) the descriptor was "Selective Mutismo" where 21 documents were found. In the Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO) the descriptor "Mutismo" was used and 41 documents were found. Finally, at " Instituto Universitário de Ciências Psicológicas, Sociais e da Vida" (ISPA) the descriptor was also "Selective Mutism" and in this 97 documents were found, totaling 159 studies. These databases were chosen for providing articles that met the theme of this research. Others were accessed, however, with these descriptors, no article or study was found.

In the second stage, only eight were selected among all the studies, and the criteria used for this choice were: those that spoke directly about the characteristics and symptoms of MS, works that related selective mutism with the child's school development and works that mentioned possible activities as a form of treatment. The other articles were discarded, as they had a clinical focus that did not meet the objectives of this research.

Then, the articles selected based on the aforementioned criteria were organized in a table, systematized according to the third phase of the integrative review, data collection.

In data collection, the third phase, is where the articles undergo an investigation, where the information and data collected are checked so that they are in accordance with the guiding question. It is in this phase that the articles are organized: which methodology was used, concepts, sample size, etc. aiming at accuracy in checking the information. The fourth phase, critical analysis of the included studies, is divided into six levels: meta-analysis evidence from several clinical studies, individual studies with experimental design, quasi-experimental studies, descriptive or qualitative studies, case reports or experience, and the last level, evidence based on expert opinion.

Finally, the discussion of the results, where the data are compared, and the presentation of the integrative review are the last two phases. In this study, the first three phases were adopted, and the following phases will be contemplated in further research.

## **RESULTS AND INITIAL DATA ANALYSIS**

As can be seen in Appendix A, in the articles by Ribeiro (2013) and Figueiras (2017) the authors conclude that ludotherapy, ludic activity and games are important and help for the good development of children with selective mutism, since Rocha (2014) presents art therapy as an adequate response to MS problems. Silva (2012) also defends the use of games and Active Methods as a way to help the child's school progress. Melo (2017) and Filipe (2019), emphasize the importance that the school plays in the development of students with MS and point to the development of strategies that meet the needs and, at the same time, promote the inclusion and participation of all: teachers, students, school management and parents.

In his work, Candeias (2018) focuses on the importance of diagnosing and treating children with selective mutism. The diagnosis is made by the school psychologist, but the teacher has an important role since he is the one who will refer the student to the professional. With the diagnosis made, the teacher, together with other specialized professionals, will elaborate methods that can be used so that there is a development on the part of the student.

The author also points to the fact that there is misinformation on the part of parents, and also society in general, about what MS is, its characteristics, treatments, and how this misinformation can be reduced by school professionals.

Silva (2017) analyzed the relevance of

information and communication technologies (ICT) and how their use can contribute to the development of socio-cognitive skills in students with special educational needs (SEN), promoting inclusion. Children with selective mutism are part of the group of students with SEN, therefore, as the author concludes in her work, the use of ICT promotes autonomy, self-esteem, motivation and interaction, generating an evolution in cognition, in the physical, social and emotional aspects of students with SEN.

Most of the authors used case study or integrative literature review as methodology, pointing out that there are still not so many records about this disorder. All selected articles seek to point out ways that both parents and educators can use to accompany the child with Selective Mutism, so that he can have a healthy and positive school, social and personal development without delays and, if any, which does not affect her so much.

From the selected studies, we seek to answer the question listed for this research: What strategies can the teacher adopt to soften the impact of selective mutism on the academic performance of the child?

## **SELECTIVE MUTISM**

Selective mutism is characterized as a childhood anxiety disorder that affects children of preschool and school age, and its main aspect is the lack of communication in certain environments in which social interaction is expected (SILVA, 2012).

According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, the DSM-V (AMERICAN PSYCHIATRIC ASSOCIATION – APA, 2014, p. 45), MS is defined as:

An anxiety disorder characterized by the absence of speech in one or more contexts or settings. Selective mutism can appear in children with a speech disorder due to the

embarrassment caused by their limitations. Many children with selective mutism, however, have normal speech in “safe” places, such as at home or with close friends.

MS is linked to problems of an anxious nature and to be able to diagnose it, it needs to manifest itself for more than a month. In situations where the child has been diagnosed, if there is no appropriate intervention, there may be consequences for adult life. MS can also be the beginning of what becomes a social phobia in adulthood (SANTOS, 2005).

### **IMPACTS ON THE LEARNING OF CHILDREN WITH SELECTIVE MUTISM**

Children with selective mutism exhibit a behavior characterized by difficulty expressing themselves in public, talking about themselves, difficulty expressing their feelings and desires, in addition to avoiding eye contact (SILVA; RIBEIRO, 2015).

Because of this, the child with selective mutism ends up having a delay in his academic development, precisely because he does not communicate with other children and with the teacher. The impacts of MS on the child's life can be seen as:

Even if indirectly, this pathology can lead to isolation. But it can, later on, like all children's conditions in which there are integration difficulties, lead to a decrease in self-esteem, mood swings and, in the long term, frankly diminish the child's desire and will to be in school, leading to failure and dropout. school (SANTOS, 2005, p. 51).

The child with selective mutism may also show signs prior to entering school, such as refusal to enter school, difficulty separating from parents, crying and screaming expressing their desire to leave, desire not to stay in the environment and also complaints of headaches or stomach pains (SANTOS, 2005).

The first signs of MS appear at preschool

and school age, so it is important for teachers to be aware of the behavior of their students, because the faster the MS is identified, the better it is for this child, as there is appropriate intervention. the student's development will not be so affected, and may even follow the other children normally (SANTOS, 2005 and SILVA, 2012).

### **ELEMENTS THAT MILD THE IMPACT OF SELECTIVE MUTISM ON ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT**

It is necessary, first, to know the context in which the child with MS is inserted so that, only then, can it be identified which intervention is best for each case.

In their works, Melo (2016) and Figueiras (2017) emphasize playful activities and games, in addition to indicating Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) as a therapeutic approach for intervention to occur, thus starting from the observation of behavior and the environment in which the child is inserted. Melo (2016) also says, as a form of school intervention, that the teachers' objectives, in addition to the multidisciplinary team, must be to lower anxiety levels, as well as encourage students with MS to communicate.

Santos (2005) expresses the need that the professionals of the multidisciplinary team, as well as the teacher, have to show the child that they believe in their communication competence, being necessary to promote forms of interaction and communication, whether spoken or written. The active methods as intervention are:

An education based on active methods, whether manipulative materials, carrying out experiments, structured games, group dynamics, etc., allows students to feel integrated in their surroundings, to express themselves freely, to develop their potential for self-reflection (intrapersonal competence) and the relationship with others (interpersonal competence), avoiding



Therefore, playful activities and play therapy based on development, if applied with an intervention program designed exclusively for each child with selective mutism, will bring excellent results (RIBEIRO, 2013). All of these proposals are possibilities that can ease and promote the inclusion of children with MS with less negative impacts on development in school spaces.

## **PLAY THERAPY**

Children, in general, dedicate most of their time to games and recreational activities with or without the aid of materials. The act of playing, being free, without structuring or in a structured way, has rules on which the child is based, directing his behavior and helping his development, since when playing, symbolization and representation processes occur, generating abstract thinking (VYGOTSKY, 2007).

Bettelheim (1979) differentiates the game from the game: the game has a set of rules that restrict the child's imagination, making them more focused on reality, on the other and on the consequences of their choices in the game, causing them to be more greater idea of competitiveness, in addition to the fact that games help control impulses; on the other hand, in play the rules are more malleable, elaborated by the child himself, with no clear purpose.

Ribeiro (2013, p. 31) points out four benefits that play has on child development, they are: boosting child development, discovering social relationships, assessing and comparing skills and appropriating codes and social roles. For learning to take place, according to Piaget (2010), assimilation and adaptation need to occur, where the first is the process that correlates lived experiences with new information, and the second is when this new information is accommodated in the brain,

generating so learning.

Piaget and Inhelder (2003) classifies games into three types: exercise game, symbolic game and rule game; the first present in the sensorimotor stage, where there is a lot of repetition and the focus is on the senses and movements; the second, present in the preoperative stage, whose focus is on the imagination, there are no rules and undergoes changes according to the child's age; and the third arises in the concrete operational stage, where rule games are important for group interaction.

Ludotherapy, therefore, is a form of psychotherapy that seeks to restore the child's psychological well-being through ludic activity (SCHAEFER, 1994). This technique can also be seen with the purpose of knowing the child's reality, enabling an intervention (RIBEIRO, 2013). Therefore, as Ribeiro (2013) points out, recreational activities facilitate the child's learning and development, contributing to good mental health, and in the cases of children with selective mutism, facilitate the processes of communication, learning and socialization.

## **FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Based on the above, based on the studies selected for this brief research, it is initially concluded that research on selective mutism is essential for better monitoring of the child, both by teachers and family members, with the aim of not cause a possible delay in their learning.

The sooner the MS is identified, the greater the possibilities for the child to have a better academic, personal and social development, since he or she will have better chances of accompanying the class together with the other students, also developing their social side and decreasing the chances of, in adulthood, a social phobia will develop. Thus, play therapy comes in as a way to mitigate the

impacts caused by selective mutism, since the act of playing, especially in children with the disorder, facilitates communication, learning and socialization processes, contributing to good mental health.

Far from concluding the considerations on the subject, this study will be resumed in later research in which the Integrative Review will be continued, since, in addition to expanding the data, it is intended to deepen in the fourth part of the review and, then, to present the final data of the same.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A - ORGANIZATION OF ARTICLES

Author	Title	Year and place	Type	Methodology	Problematic	Key words	Conclusion	Access
Silva, América	ICT in promoting educational success in students with special educational needs (SEN)	07/12/2017 Lisboa	Dissertation	This work took the form of a case study, developed according to a qualitative approach.	Analyze the relevance of the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in education and the contribution that its use can make in the development of students with special educational needs (SEN), promoting their inclusion.	Information and communication technology; Special educational needs; Students; Education; School libraries; Skills development; Educational success; Educational resources; Collaborative work; Inclusion	We concluded that ICT, as tools that promote motivation, autonomy, self-esteem and interaction, offer very significant advantages for the cognitive, physical, social and emotional development of students with SEN.	bit.ly/4397OEB
Melo, Sara Isabel Cabral	Selective Mutism: The Chatty Project	01/02/2017, apresentada no ISPA	Dissertation	The methodology used was a case study. For the collection of information, a basic intervention plan, semi-structured interview and filling in of forms were used.	The main issue is selective mutism and how it affects the child's development.	Selective mutism; Anxiety; social phobia; Intervention.	The results indicate that with a systematized approach and in articulation with the main social contexts in which the child is involved, the SM can be overcome.	bit.ly/43rvfsX
Ribeiro, Célia Margarida da Silva	Selective mutism and ludotherapy / ludic activity	Abril de 2013, Lisboa	Dissertation	The questionnaire was chosen as an investigation tool; The questionnaire was carried out in the form of anonymity.	This study seeks to answer the question "Does ludic activity and ludotherapy contribute to overcoming Selective Mutism?"	Selective multism; Ludotherapy; Playful activities.	As for ludotherapy and ludic activities, it was possible to outline important concepts and lines of thought that allow the use of these activities for the benefit of the child's development and overcoming the symptoms of MS	bit.ly/3UgQ6uu



Figueiras, Ana Sofia Neves	Efficacy factors in clinical intervention in selective mutism: case study	Junho de 2017, Universidade de Minho	Dissertation	The treatment consisted of 47 sessions, including psychoeducation, relaxation, playful games, exposure and reward system	To understand MS and its implications in the child's life in more detail	Selective mutism; Cognitive-behavioral therapy; game therapy. team of therapists	The progress achieved is listed throughout the study and arises from a team work of therapists, specifically directed towards the child. Studies are still needed on this problem, to find more answers that can help these children.	bit.ly/3M-rWH3G
Ana Maria Oliveira da Silva	Inclusion of Students with SEN (Selective Mutism) in Regular Foreign Language Classes - Spanish	12/12/2012, Universidade do Porto	Dissertation	A qualitative, exploratory and descriptive study, the considerations of theorists who defend Curriculum Differentiation and the use of Active Methods, as a way of promoting the construction of learning and the inclusion of students.	This is the case of the problem known as Selective Mutism	Inclusion; Curriculum Differentiation; Active Methods; Teachers' training path	If everyone collaborates and unites in the same direction, including students with special educational needs, this task can become an easy and at the same time enriching task, since diversity brings knowledge, development and personal and psychosocial enrichment.	bit.ly/3m7L9YE
Lénia Cristina Martins Filipe	Selective Mutism: A Case Study Silence is not always very important!	20/09/2019 ESEF – Escola Superior de Educação de Fafe	Dissertation	In the present work, the case study was chosen.	Selective mutism, a case study	Selective Mutism; Children/ Adolescents; School; Inclusion	After analyzing the case, it is possible to verify the importance of the school being attentive to its students and developing strategies that meet the needs and, at the same time, promote the inclusion and participation of all students in the class and school.	bit.ly/43pYMTM
Rocha, Isabel Cristina Pinela da	In the silence of words...: the consented gesture!	10/03/2015, Viseu (na Universidade Católica Portuguesa)	Dissertation	Qualitative research methodology based on direct observation of art therapy sessions and interviews with the class teacher and the child's parents at two different times.	Selective mutism: verify to what extent art therapy is an adequate answer to selective mutism problems	Special education; Selective mutism; Art therapy; Intervention	The results demonstrate, in general terms, that art therapy actually plays a leading, active and facilitating role in the possibility of transformation and personal development in a specific case of a family with a child with selective mutism	bit.ly/3zFNxsw

Candeias, Patricia Reis	Selective Mutism and the School: a descriptive and theoretical study	2018, Rio de Janeiro	Dissertation	Two studies were carried out, the first an integrative literature review and the second the application of questionnaires to educators, psychologists, parents and the general population, all residents of the city of Rio de Janeiro, about what they think and know about MS.	Identify the importance of the role of the school in the diagnosis and treatment of children with Selective Mutism	Integrative Review; Descriptive Study; Social Psychology; Selective Mutism; School	There is a mismatch between what professionals know and what the general population knows about selective mutism. The work showed a distance that needs to be reduced through information to parents and that school professionals can offer.	bit.ly/3UhNXyK
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