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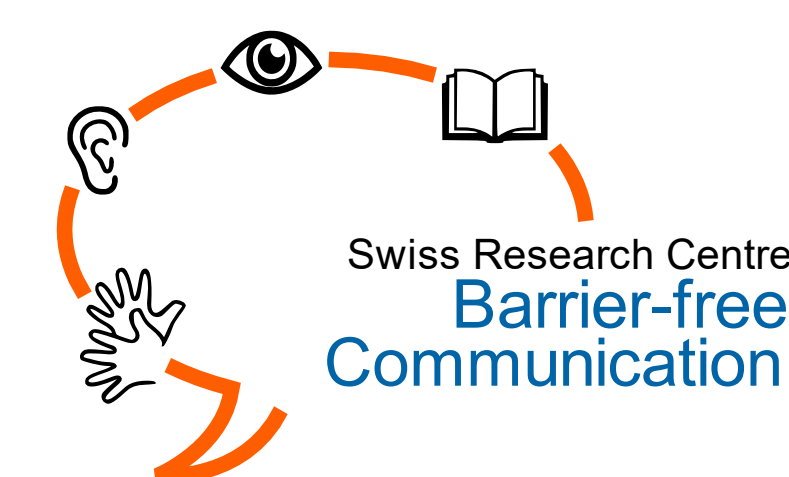
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A Survey on the Learning Materials for Children with Special Needs: Building a Case for Easy-to-Read in the Classroom



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Abstract: As stipulated in the United Nation Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), people with disabilities have a right to education and to “reasonable accommodation of the individual’s requirements” (CRPD 2006). The Department of Translation Technologies at the University of Geneva is collaborating with Handi-Capable, a Swiss association that supports the families of children with Cerebral Palsy (CP), on a project, which aims to enhance inclusive education in Switzerland. Easy-to-Read (EtR) language research has resulted in (a) the development of guidelines concerning the adaptation of texts and (b) its potential for various target groups with reading difficulties being demonstrated, i.e., dyslexia, learning disabilities, dementia, low literacy, non-native speakers etc. (Tronbacke, Nomura, and Nielsen 2010). In view of this versatility, one of the goals of our project is to determine whether such guidelines can be applied to the learning material adapted for children with cognitive impairment, as the proportion of children with CP and intellectual impairment has been reported to vary between 40% and 65% (Dalvand et al. 2012). For this purpose, a questionnaire will be sent to the specialised teachers in the French-speaking Canton of Vaud, in Switzerland. This exploratory study will enable us to collect data on current practices, the level of adaptation of the materials and the technology used in class. This data will underpin the design of a further study to test EtR content in a real-life scenario. We expect that the abovementioned studies will contribute to the development of a new set of methods and best practices designed to improve inclusive education and success for children with special needs.

Target population

Specialised teachers (around 70 people):
❖ employed by the Canton of Vaud
❖ active in 2018/2019
❖ who teach children with disability in mainstream schools (primary and secondary level)

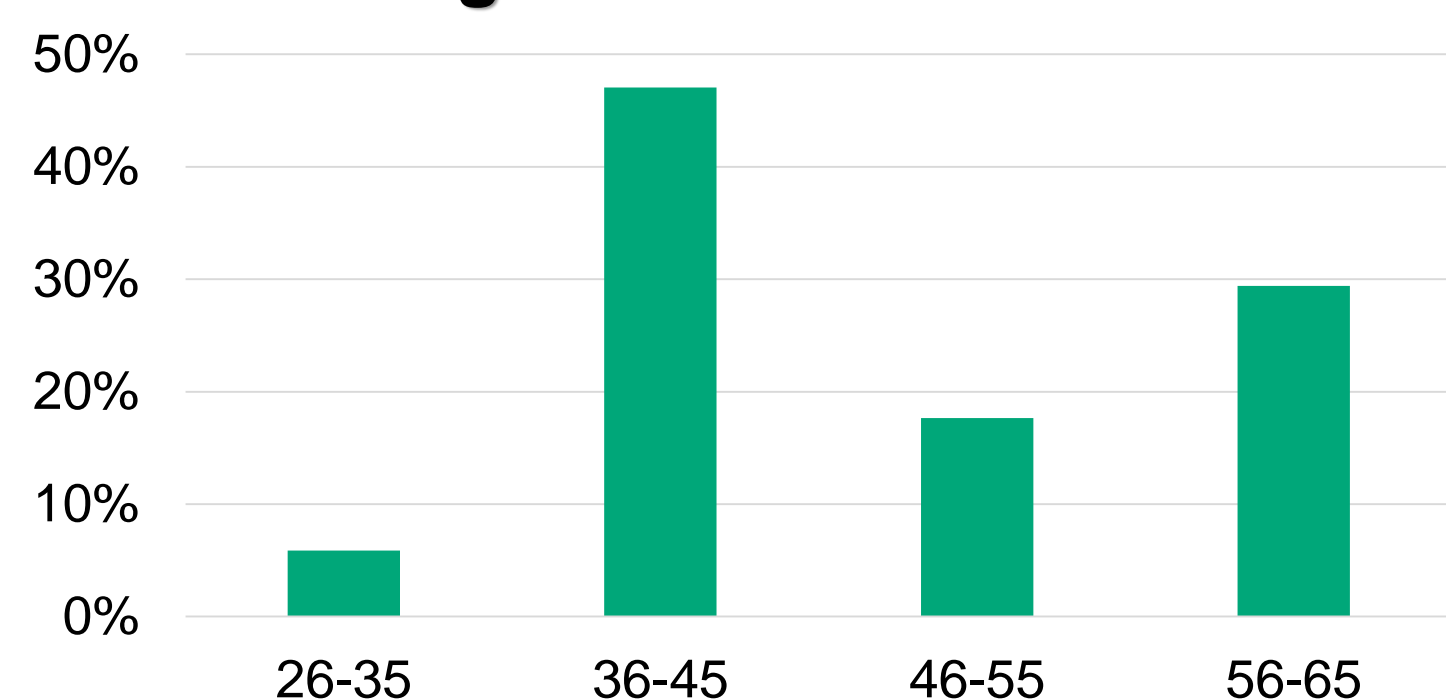
Preliminary profile of respondents (N=17)

6% male
94% female

82% Swiss nationality

18% other nationality

Age of the teachers



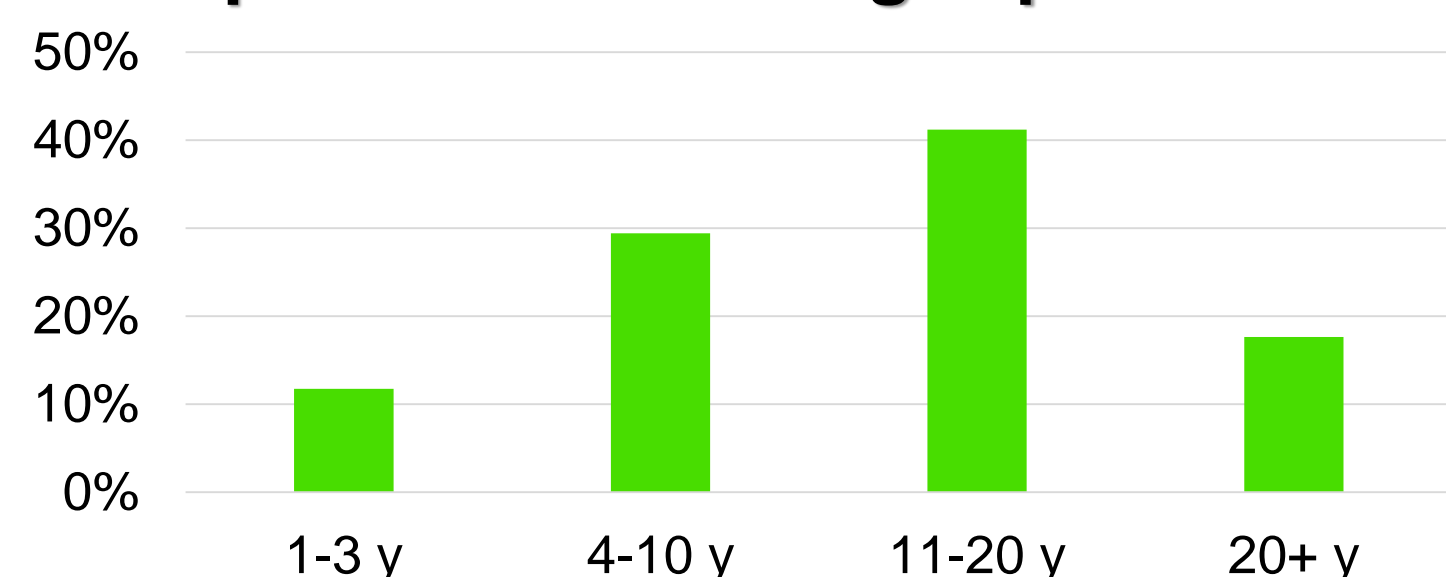
Education



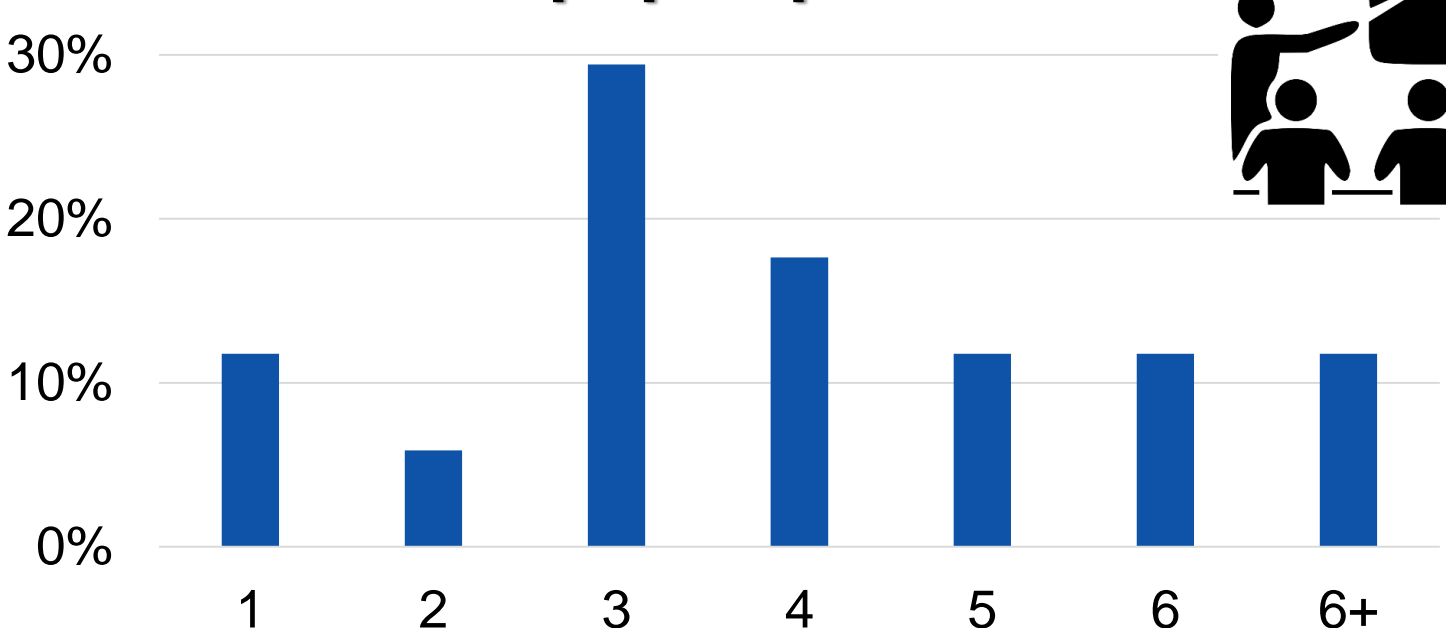
76% of respondents have obtained a Master's degree in Special Education or a related field.

24% of respondents have obtained a diploma or a certificate in the field of Education.

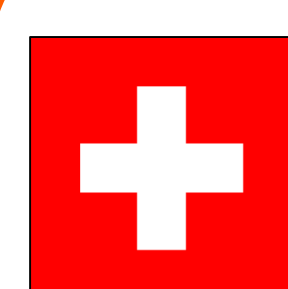
Specialised teaching experience



Number of pupils per teacher

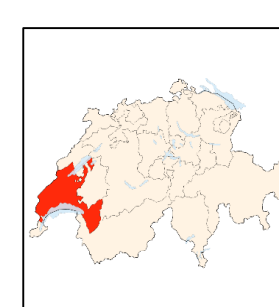


THE SURVEY



Switzerland is a federal state. Although the Constitution and national legislation provide a general framework, the Swiss education policy is defined by 26 cantonal laws. Since 2008, Special education is managed and financed by Cantons.

In the Canton of Vaud, the region we are currently focusing on, the 2011 *Loi sur l'enseignement obligatoire* prescribes that “teachers use different teaching methods to make their teaching accessible to all of their pupils”.



CONTEXT



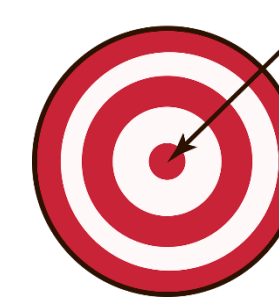
The latest strategy in the Canton Vaud, the 360° Concept aims to foster inclusion through a combination of universal design for learning for all children and specialised measures in a mainstream environment for children with special needs.

Although EtR content is not officially used in the Canton of Vaud, guidelines to adapt content for children with SN resemble EtR guidelines. To assess the potential of EtR in the classroom it is necessary to collect data on current practices.



MOTIVATION

- ❖ Collect data on specialised measures and assistive technology used in the Canton of Vaud in relation to the class and disability of the pupil.
- ❖ Investigate the popularity of EtR among specialised teachers.
- ❖ Find out about current applications of EtR in the classroom (if any).



OBJECTIVES

- ❖ Purposive sampling to recruit targeted respondents.
- ❖ Survey information and URL (in French) distributed via email by line managers.
- ❖ Survey checked for content validity by project committee (experts) and a specialised teacher.
- ❖ Respondents were given one week to complete the survey.



METHOD

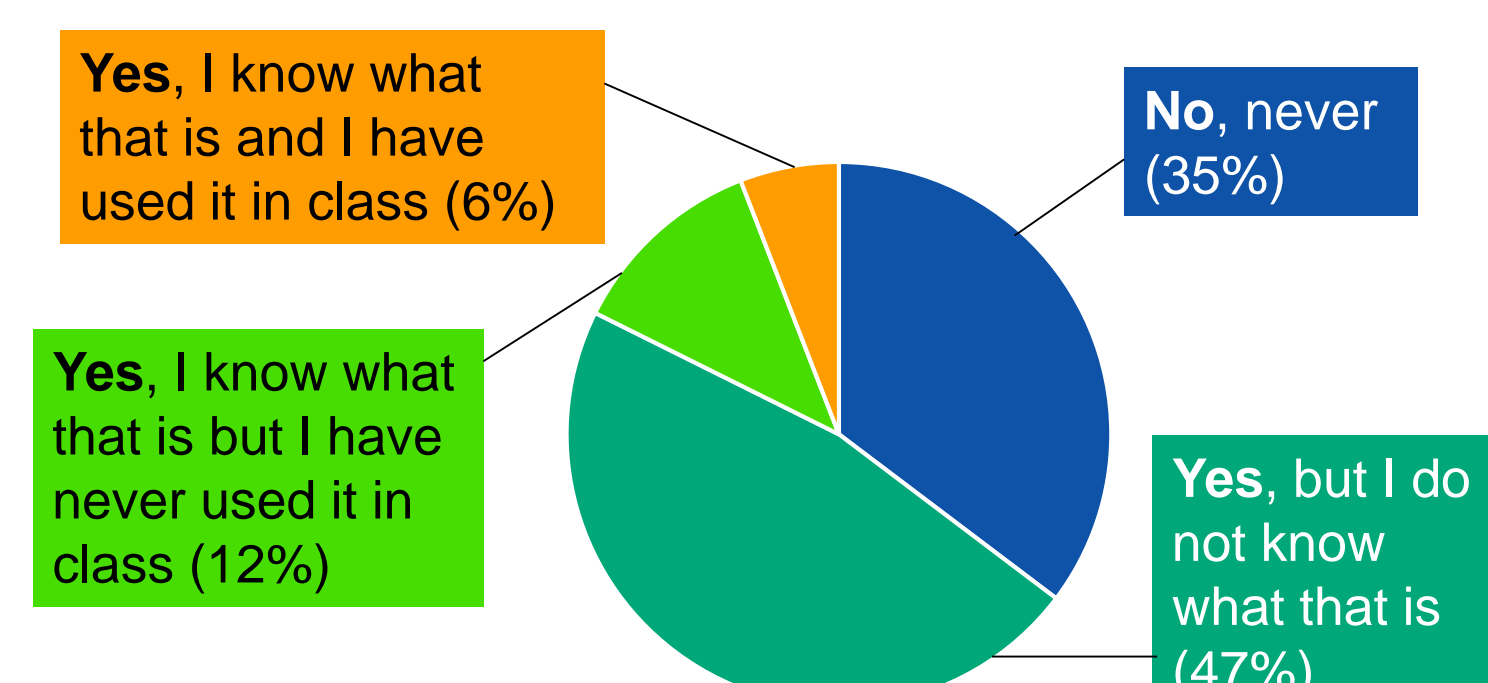
- ❖ The results of one more section of the questionnaire have yet to be analysed → identify patterns.
- ❖ Adapt the questionnaire in order to send it to other cantons → compare the results.
- ❖ Positive attitude of the respondent teachers → follow-up interviews and design of a study to test the use of EtR in a real-life scenario.



FUTURE WORK

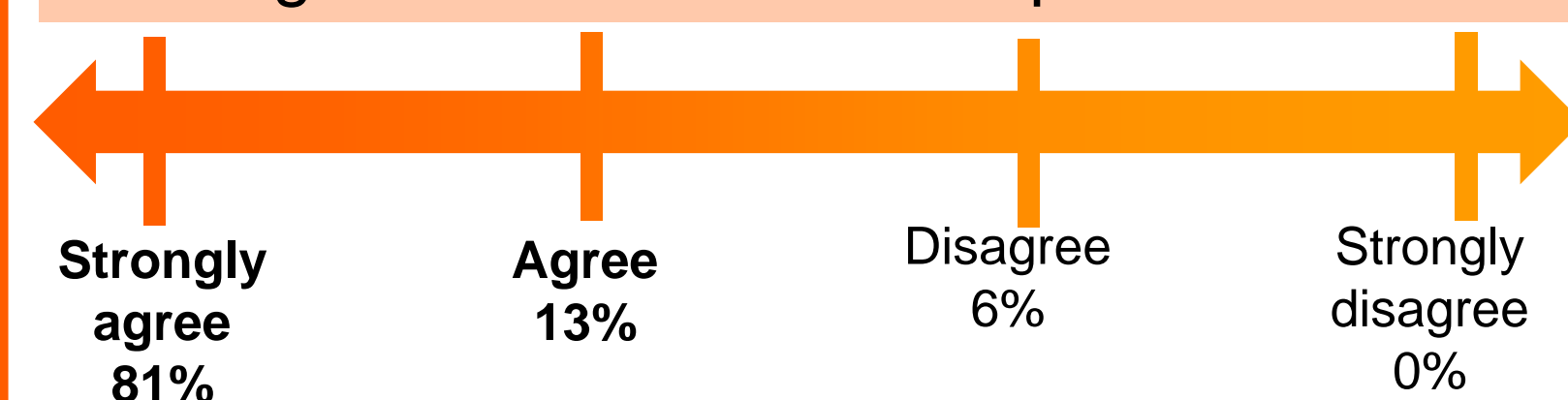
Preliminary results

Have you ever heard of Easy-to-Read or Plain language (*langue facile à lire et à comprendre* or *FALC* in French)?



[For those who have never used it]

Do you think simplifying certain texts, instructions or exercises could improve the comprehension and learning process of some categories of children with special needs?



In what circumstances/in what cases would you use it in class?

Themes that emerged (by frequency):

- ❖ Enhancing reading comprehension
- ❖ ‘Dys’ disorders
- ❖ Autism spectrum disorder
- ❖ All children
- ❖ Intellectual disability
- ❖ Special needs children
- ❖ Speech disorders
- ❖ Adapting instructions
- ❖ Attention-deficit (hyperactivity) disorder
- ❖ Behavioural disorders
- ❖ Enhancing listening comprehension
- ❖ Universal design for learning

For example:

P17 “In any case and for all pupils, as it avoids useless complexity”.

P13 “History, geography and sciences; with a view to universal design for learning, it could help several pupils, not just the ones with special needs.”

Why would you not use it in class?

P1 “It would be complicated to adapt for just one pupil in a mainstream class and it would create differences between the pupils.”

[For the participant who has used it]

How did you know about it and how did you use it?

P5 “We had to apply EtR during a course of the Special Education Master’s and I had the chance to use it at work to simplify mathematical data and instructions.”

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HANDI-CAPABLE

SESAP
Service de
l’enseignement
spécialisé
et de l’appui
à la formation

Stiftung Schweizer Zentrum
für Heil- und Sonderpädagogik
Fondation Centre suisse
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