



APPROACHES AND CHARACTERISTICS OF LEARNING DIFFICULTIES IN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

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Abstract:

Learning disabilities are the most numerous group of special educational needs and refer to people who do not benefit from formal education and present in the majority of their difficulties in reading and decoding. In the work, you attempt to theoretically understand the information in relation to the physiology of learning difficulties, so that teachers are able to understand and subsequently intervene by improving the cognitive function of those individuals who present a strong differentiation of learning image compared to other children, which have low school performance. Early detection of learning difficulties allows for early and effective intervention. The thesis is structured in bibliographic research references and its writing was also based on my many years of teaching experience.

Keywords: learning difficulties, dyslexia, behavioral problems

1. Introduction

Looking back at the recent past we will see the serious deficit in the educational community regarding the detection, understanding and treatment of learning difficulties. Today and while there is a huge amount of research activity related to learning disabilities, a statistically significant percentage of teachers need further training. Thus, this work aims at the first presentation of learning disabilities, in order to clarify any misunderstandings and dispel myths related to the existence of learning disabilities.

Attempting a brief historical review, Strauss & Lehtinen (Strauss, A. A., & Lehtinen, L. E., 1947) referring to the encephalopathic child, who presents a deficiency in the neuromotor system, considered that his difficulties are due to organic damage as well as disturbances in perception, thinking or emotional behavior. Strauss and Kephart (Kephart, N. C., & Deutsch, S., 1954), then hypothesized that there could be a descriptive definition based on symptomatology alone and named it Strauss syndrome. From 1965

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onwards, other definitions were formulated, such as Kirk's (Kirk, S. A., & McCarthy, J. J., 1961), which was adopted by the National Advisory Committee on Handicapped Children (National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities, 1987). According to him: "... children with learning difficulties present some disorder in one or more of the basic processes referred to in the use of written or spoken language. This category includes cases such as minimal cerebral dysfunction, dyslexia, dysphasia, dyscalculia, etc. These conditions are not due to obvious sensory impairments, mental retardation or serious emotional disturbances." The medical definition was also introduced by Myklebust (1957), who perceived these difficulties as symptoms amenable to pedagogical "treatment", giving more weight to phenomenology (Tzouriadou, M. & Barbas, G. 2003).

2. Literature Review: Research Data on the Characteristics of Students with Learning Disabilities

2.1 Purpose

The main aim of writing the paper was the need to obtain a theoretical background of the learning characteristics of the students' learning difficulties. Such knowledge will allow teachers to understand both the etiology of learning difficulties, to mitigate their learning deficits, always taking into account their needs. I hope that the work will contribute to the realization of the universally accepted pedagogical concept of one school for all.

The purpose of this paper is the conceptual clarification of learning disabilities, by looking back at the related research past and recording the main characteristics that students with learning disabilities present. The early diagnosis of learning difficulties allows immediate intervention, having as a natural consequence the mitigation of learning psycho-emotional deficits.

2.2. Historical Review of Learning Disabilities

Bateman, B. (1965). focused on the variation between skill and active performance, while Kirk (Kirk, S. A., & McCarthy, J. J., 1961) defined that these disorders can manifest as "*disorders in understanding, thinking, speaking, reading, writing, in spelling and arithmetic*" (Tzouriadou, 1995). In the 1960s and 1970s, the concept prevailed that the basis of learning difficulties lies in the improper processing of visual stimuli. This hypothesis starts from the interpretation of Orton (1937), about the reversal errors that children show in relation to the perception of symbols. In the mid-1970s, the interpretation began to be questioned and it was considered that the presenting disorders of perception co-exist with learning difficulties.

In the decade 1975-1985, those directly involved with learning difficulties, i.e. parents and professionals, united and raised claims both at the level of central political planning and local practice regarding the education of children. At the same time, new research hypotheses are developed (e.g. metacognitive theory), which could lead to the design of new teaching programs.

Although the term learning disabilities was first used by Kirk (Kirk, S. A., & McCarthy, J. J., 1961) they were defined by a more recent and widely accepted definition

of learning disabilities proposed by Hammill (Hammill, D., 1998). Based on this definition, a year later, in 1991, the Joint National Committee on Learning Disabilities in the USA proposed the following definition: "*Learning disabilities is a general term that refers to a heterogeneous group of disorders, which are manifested by significant difficulties in the acquisition or use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning or mathematical skills. These disorders are inherent to the individual, are thought to be due to malfunctions of the central nervous system, and may occur throughout life. Problems in self-regulatory behaviors, interpersonal perception, and social interaction may occur alongside learning disabilities but do not constitute the same learning disability. Although learning disabilities may occur in conjunction with other disabling conditions (e.g. sensory deficiency, mental retardation, severe emotional disturbance) or with external influences (such as cultural differences, and inadequate or inappropriate education) they are not the direct result of these states or effects*" (Doikou & Aulidou, 2002; Polychroni, Hatzichristou & Bibou, 2006; Pumfrey & Reason, 1998: 17).

2.3. Characteristics of High School Students with Learning Disabilities

Both the manifestations and the possible etiology of learning difficulties appear highly varied, to the extent that it is difficult to find any characteristics common to all children with learning disabilities. Perception difficulties, motor disorders, attention disorders, memory disorders, social-emotional problems, motivational problems and metacognitive disorders have been recorded as characteristics of children with learning difficulties (Kirk & Gallagher, 1989).

Regarding perception difficulties for a long period of time (decades of the 60s and 70s), the visual processing of information was investigated. Starting from Orton's (1937) hypothesis regarding the interpretation of reversal errors (eg '3' instead of 'e'), a number of hypotheses were investigated that linked reading difficulties with visual or visuospatial perception problems.

However, from the mid-1970s, this view began to be challenged (Vellutino et al., 1973). Thus, among readers with visual-spatial and auditory-phonetic problems, it was found that 40% of dyslexic children have both types of problems, over 50% have auditory-phonetic difficulties, while only 10% of dyslexic individuals have basically visual-spatial difficulties (analysis - synthesis - reversal) (Benton, A., 1975) it is, therefore, possible that the perception disorders recorded in children with learning difficulties are a separate disorder that coexists with learning difficulties, but without having a causal relationship with them. Today, scientists are inclined to the opinion that in the vast majority of them, reading difficulties are the result of a serious deficiency in linguistic and more specifically in phonological processing (Wagner et al., 1987). The term phonological processing here refers to the child's ability to understand that words are made up of phonemes and to be able to use phonemes as linguistic units to make words. In many cases, the belief of scientists about the role of phonological processing skills in creating reading difficulties is so strong that the existence of disorders in the skills of phonological processing is proposed as a unique element of differential diagnosis of specific reading difficulties (Stanovich, K., 1993; Siegel, Daniel J., 1957).

2.4. Identification - Causes of Learning Difficulties

The vast majority of children with learning difficulties are identified after they have already failed at school. Although there is no definition of how much a child must fail to qualify as a child with learning disabilities, a child is usually considered a candidate for inclusion in the learning disabilities category when he or she performs at least 2 years below his or her school inclusion level and his abilities.

The above determination, however, leads to the creation of two problematic conditions:

- 1) Children are recognized when they have already accumulated 2 years of failure with significant consequences for their self-confidence and willingness to learn,
- 2) After at least 2 years of school failure, even if children may initially face a specific problem, their difficulties take on a more extended and comprehensive character, since learning is not a cumulative process of completely distinct knowledge.

Family, financial, social, cultural and other problems are not a cause of learning difficulties. Of course, it is pointed out that it is possible for the mentioned factors to coexist and have an effect, but they should not be responsible for the creation of learning difficulties.

In addition to external factors, other endogenous factors, such as mental retardation, sensory disorders and social-emotional disorders, are also excluded as causative factors. This certainly does not exclude a blind child, for example, from also having learning difficulties, but it assumes that these are not due to visual impairment.

2.5 Cognitive - Behavioral - Social Deficits

2.5.1 Language and Mathematics

The following are usually observed in specific courses: the student avoids reading and writing

- often misreads written information;
- has difficulty summarizing;
- has difficulty retelling a story in the correct order;
- has a poor understanding of the written word;
- has difficulty understanding the written word in all subjects;
- makes many mistakes in spelling;
- has difficulty with abstract concepts;
- produces very poor written language;
- has difficulty in learning a foreign language;
- has difficulty understanding the place value of digits;
- has difficulty applying basic mathematical knowledge.

2.5.2 Attention and Organization

- has difficulty following complex instructions;
- has difficulty concentrating on a task;
- struggles with multiple-choice tests;
- works late in class and on exams;

- does not take good notes;
- finds it difficult to control his work;
- has difficulty organizing time and activities.

2.5.3. Social Skills

- does not accept criticism;
- has difficulty understanding non-verbal signals in communication;
- has difficulty interpreting social situations;
- often misinterprets the behavior of others;
- has difficulty negotiating or standing up for himself;
- succumbs easily to peer pressure, and finds it difficult to "put yourself in" the other person's shoes.

3. Results and Discussion

Children with learning disabilities are bad writers, making illegible letters and many spelling mistakes. They may press their pencil, write slowly and with difficulty, and seem to move the whole arm. They are immature to distinguish the left side from the right side, they cannot follow the lines and curves that a letter requires. They get tired quickly, keep erasing and smudge a lot. They don't leave the right spaces between words, some stick them, some forget them and they can't keep a straight line on a blank page. They omit and reverse letters or syllables, and replace consonants (γ - χ , ξ - ψ , letters-money). They don't stress or de-stress words, use punctuation, start sentences with capital letters or put them in the middle of words. They write mirrors (e-3, p-9, ah-ha). They make a lot of mistakes in copying too. However, they may draw very well, because the difficulty in writing is due to their poor visual motor perception and difficulty in hand-eye coordination.

The spoken word and the written word are directly connected as, in order for the latter to be cultivated and constructive, the former must have reached a very satisfactory level in order to help produce a mature and correct text. For this reason, the existence of science that will help the sensitized teacher to intervene and provide creative solutions for the benefit of the student is deemed necessary. One such science is the Pedagogy (Education) of speech and speech. It is a science of theory and practice that aims to educate, teach and practice oral and written language through the pedagogical process. Thus, the teacher has the possibility through his work to try to provide a solution to various problems that are presented to him in his daily school life and concern his student.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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