

THE DIFFICULTIES FACED BY CHILDREN WITH DYSLEXIA IN THE MAINSTREAM SCHOOL

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Abstract

Dyslexia, is one of the disorders with a greater prevalence among the group of the learning disorders. With the passing years many studies (observations) to explain the causes of dyslexia and to show the newest interventions in this field has been made. The studies about the prevalence of dyslexic children are being missed in our society, but the most important thing is that the knowledge about the difficulties faced by children with dyslexia are being missed too.

Dyslexia is a term used increasingly frequently in schools as advances in research on dyslexia have led to a greater understanding of the once hidden disability. Given dyslexia is often wrongly interpreted as a difficulty with reading (Frith,1999) the purpose of this study is to investigate the extent of the difficulties children with dyslexia have in the classroom and which are the strategies used in our schools to support the learner with dyslexia. Two research questions were identified which underpinned the study:

- ✓ What difficulties do children with dyslexia display in the mainstream classroom?
- ✓ Which are the strategies used to meet the needs of the pupil with dyslexia in the mainstream classroom?

The study was undertaken in three primary school in Tirana. Questionnaire, interview and observation were methods used in this study.

The results have shown that children with dyslexia certainly face difficulties in a wide range of areas. The respondents each reported that the child they considered had some difficulty within the areas of reading, writing, spelling, organization and memory and also emotional difficulties. Also, the results have shown that the strategies used in our schools are very poor and not effective. In conclusion, the recommendations in this study practically suggest to increase the knowledge about dyslexia and effective strategies that are used for the treatment of dyslexia.

Keywords: dyslexia, reading disability, memory problem, emotional difficulty.

Introduction

Dyslexia, is one of the disorders with a greater prevalence among the group of the learning disorders. With the passing years many studies (observations) to explain the causes of dyslexia and to show the newest interventions in this field has been made.

The aim of this study was to explore and describe the difficulties faced by children with dyslexia in the mainstream school and the strategies used to meet the needs of the pupil with dyslexia in the mainstream classroom.

Although this study had many positive aspects, there were limitations which must be pointed out. It was quite a small scale study, if it were to have been completed in a larger scale, the study may have been more reliable.

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Literature Review

Dyslexia is a very prevalent learning difficulty affecting approximately ten percent of children (Pavey, 2007). Whilst dyslexia can occur across the ability range, difficulties associated with the learning difference are more obvious in a child who has good cognitive abilities but does not progress in literacy skills. (Blackhouse & Morris, 2005)

The word dyslexia is derived from the Greek Language and it literally translates as 'difficulty with words'. Dyslexia is a term used increasingly frequently in schools, yet, it is unfortunate that its definition and explanation have long been surrounded by much confusion (Frith, 1999). Crombie (2001 cited in Reid 2009) states that "*Dyslexia as a term has long been misunderstood, misinterpreted and sometimes disbelieved*" This may be due to the fact that not all children present the same pattern of abilities and difficulties.

"Dyslexia is not one thing but many - to the extent that it may be a conceptual clearing house for a variety of difficulties with a variety of causes" (Rice & Brooks, 2004 cited in Blackhouse & Morris, 2005)

The recognition of dyslexia as a more complex range of difficulties, than reading and writing resulted in an update of the definition of dyslexia to:

" a combination of abilities and difficulties which affect the learning process in one or more of reading, spelling, writing and sometimes numeracy/language. Accompanying weaknesses may be identified in areas of speed of processing, short-term memory, sequencing, auditory and/or visual perception, spoken language and motor skills" (British Dyslexia Association, 2005)

Dyslexia is termed a specific learning difference, as an individual experiencing it may have "*a deficit in some of the processes of learning, but not all*" (DOE, 2002)

Difficulties experienced by individuals with dyslexia can be explained by a number of hypotheses. As the knowledge base regarding literacy acquisition and dyslexia has increased enormously there is a wide consensus that a phonological processing deficit is strongly linked with dyslexia. (Blackhouse & Morris, 2005)

Dyslexia is a specific learning disability that is neurobiological in origin. It is characterized by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. These difficulties typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language that is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction. Secondary consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede growth of vocabulary and background knowledge. (IDA & NICHD, 2002)

Methodology

The study was undertaken in three primary school in Tirana. The sample selected for this paper was ten dyslexic children and ten teachers. Questionnaire, interview and observation were methods used in this study. Two research questions were identified which underpinned the study:

- ✓ *What difficulties do children with dyslexia display in the mainstream classroom?*
- ✓ *Which are the strategies used to meet the needs of the pupil with dyslexia in the mainstream classroom?*

Qualitative and Quantitative research were considered. Each has its own characteristics. It was decided that both of these would be part of the study. Questionnaires were chosen as a method as they can be administered without the presence of the researcher (Cohen et al, 2000), making efficient use of time. (Munn and Drever, 1999) They also have an advantage in allowing anonymity.

Open ended questions were distanced through the questionnaire as it was noted that these can be quite time consuming and difficult to answer. (Wellington, 2000) Closed questions were widely used, taking the forms of multiple choice questions, rank order and rating scale questions (Cohen et al, 2000)

Interviews allow a researcher to investigate and probe and respondents are generally well motivated. The type of interview used was a semi structured interview, allowing flexibility on the part of the interviewer over the range and order of questions. (Wellington, 2000) The interview consisted largely of open ended questions, allowing for greater understanding of the respondent's perspectives. (Cohen et al, 2000)

Survey: was helpful in obtaining information primarily nonverbal, about children's behavior and the outward expression of inward emotional state. Children were observed during their stay in school.

Data Collection and Sample: A questionnaire was drawn up based around the research questions and likewise an interview was built. The sample group included ten teachers and ten dyslexic children. They were made aware of the research aim through a cover letter. They were assured anonymity and informed their participation was much appreciated. The researcher took care not to allow their own biases, opinions or curiosities affect their behavior during the interview. The questionnaires were examined and the results drawn up within tables and graphs before being analyzed and discussed. The interview was used to support the results from the questionnaire.

Limitations of this study: Although this study had many positive aspects, there were limitations which must be pointed out. It was quite a small scale study, if it were to have been completed in a larger scale, the study may have been more reliable. The study was completed over a relatively short time period, and given the demanding school day, the respondents found it difficult to dedicate a great deal of time to the study.

Results and Discussion

This chapter describes and discusses the findings from the research questionnaire, survey and interview, including the main difficulties which children with dyslexia face in the mainstream classroom, and the respondents interpretation of the strategies used to meet the needs of the pupil with dyslexia in the mainstream classroom.

Table 1

Table showing the reading difficulties experienced by the child with dyslexia who the respondents considered

Reading difficulty	Number of respondent who chose this
Difficulty in word recognition	6
Difficulty with remembering sounds	4
Substitution of words with those with similar meaning	2
Substitution of words with those which look similar	3
Difficulty with rhyming	3
Poor word attack skills	6
Reading slow and hesitant	8
Other	0

Table 2

Table showing the writing difficulties the respondents reported when they considered a child with dyslexia who they have taught

Writing difficulty	Number of respondent who chose this
Slow writing speed	4
Unusual writing grip	5
Inability to get ideas on paper	6
Use simply vocabulary	3
Reluctance to write	8
Problems copying from board	8
Inaccurate punctuation and grammar	2
Reversal of letters	1

Table 3

Table showing the spelling difficulties the respondents reported when they considered a child with dyslexia who they have taught.

Spelling difficulty	Number of respondent who chose this
Tendency to spell words as they sound	4
Unable to recognise their errors	3
Poor awareness os sounds	6
Letters in wrong order	2
Omission of letters within words	2
Other	0

Table 4

Table showing the emotional difficulties the respondents reported when they considered a child with dyslexia who they have taught.

Emotional difficulty	Number of respondent who chose this
Over reliant on adult support	2
Relcultance to try	5
Low self esteem or confidence	8
Anxiety	6
Task Avoidance	0
Boisterous Behaviour	4
Other	0

Table 5

Table showing the mathematical difficulties the respondents reported when they considered a child with dyslexia who they have taught.

Mathematical difficulty	Number of respondent who chose this
Place Value	0
Attaching meaning to symbols	1
Mathematical language	3
Recognition of patterns	0
Mental Maths	2
Number Recognition	0
Fact Recall	2
Other	1

Table 6

Table showing the memory difficulties the respondents reported when they considered a child with dyslexia who they have taught.

Memory problem	Number of respondent who chose this
Difficulty remembering instructions	5
Problems with sequencing e.g day of week	0
Poor organisation of work and materials	0
Poor concentration	4
Difficulty time keeping	2
Other	0

Table 7

Table showing the strategies used to meet the needs of the pupil with dyslexia in the mainstream classroom.

Classroom method	Number of respondents who chose this
Lighting Appropriate	0
Child in suitable seat	1
Board writing in different colors	0
Key words placed around classroom	0
Colored overlays used	0
Cream paper instead of white	0
Font size changed	0
Over learning	0
Flow chart used	0
Mnemonics	0
Desktop aids available	0

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the results obtained from measuring instruments and methods used, I have reached the following conclusions and recommendations :

- Number of children with dyslexic disorder who are not identified is much greater than what we know, for the lack of information and appropriate methods to recognize and detect such issues
- To emphasize the importance of early identification of dyslexia in our schools
- To increase the knowledge about dyslexia as a disorder in our mainstream school
- To increase the knowledge about the effective strategies that are used for the treatment of dyslexia in our mainstream school

To conclude, it seems, children with dyslexia certainly face difficulties in a wide range of areas. The respondents each reported that the child they considered had some difficulty within the areas of reading, writing, spelling, organization and memory and also emotional difficulties. Over a quarter of respondents didn't highlight numeracy as a major problem. From the results it is indeed apparent that dyslexia is undeniably a learning difference inherent with a cluster of difficulties, cutting across the whole curriculum (Regan & Woods, 2000) and not all children present the same pattern of abilities and difficulties.

Also, the results have shown that the strategies used in our schools are very poor and not effective. In conclusion, the recommendations in this study practically suggest to increase the knowledge about dyslexia and effective strategies that are used for the treatment of dyslexia.

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