# "Psycho-educative intervention for students with learning difficulties-A regional study"

## Manolita Hida, PhD Candidate[1]

## MSc. Elona Mustafaraj[2]

## MSc. Besiana Kaziu[3]

Various studies indicate that using intervention strategies in children with learning difficulties gives positive results in improving the issues outlined by them.

However there are gaps between strategies and what teachers use in classrooms.

## 1.0 DEFINITION OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

This study aims to understand more about the strategies used by teachers and their understanding of the subject.

## 2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

The term 'minimal brain dysfunction' (learning disability) refers to children with general intelligence close to the average or above average, with some learning disabilities and behaviors ranging from moderate to severe, which are related to deviations of the central nervous system function. These deviations can be manifested in different combinations of impairments in perception, conceptualization, language, memory and attention control, impulses or motor function (Clements, 1968).

Learning takes place through 5 steps:

- ✓ Obtaining information through the senses.
- ✓ Determining what information means.
- ✓ Conservation of the information in memory.
- ✓ Recalling the information when it's needed.
- ✓ Using the information effectively way.

People with learning disabilities have a malfunction or abnormality in any of these steps (Warner, 1988). This malfunction can be a sign of other problems ( example. lack or inappropriate social skills, sensory or physical deficits). These problems are not part of learning disorder but can be associated with them (Brinckerhoff, Sha' & McGuire, 1993).

The deficit exists in the learning processes and not in their ability to learn.

---

[1] Assistant Professor at "Aleksander Xhuvani" University- hidamanolita@gmail.com
   Assistant Professor at University of Tirana
[2] Assistant Professor at "Aleksander Xhuvani" University- 1_mustafaraj@yahoo.com
[3] Assistant Professor at "Aleksander Xhuvani" University- besianakaziu@yahoo.com

Vygotsky and his theory of social constructivism emphasize the role that teachers and students have in the learning process. (McLeod, 2013). The theory of social constructivism is based on peer education , clear guidance, self-monitoring and technology-related strategies. The most knowledgeable person refers to someone or something that has a better understanding for a specific requirement or task (such as electronic support to help children with learning disabilities). The most knowledgeable person supports the principle of Proximal Development Zone (PDZ). Proximal Development Area is the difference between what a student can achieve independently and what a student can achieve through peer education, clear instructions, self-monitoring or technology (McLeod, 2013).

Guidelines by peers.

The classes in which the guidelines are given by peers are an example in which learners are taught by their peers who are most cautiously supervised by their teachers. These include four components:

a) teams that change every week,

 b) maximally structured guide protocol

c) daily feedback through rewards that can be earned

d) direct practices

Peer instructions are only performed in cases where learning content is previously learned through direct instructions and requires a minimum of 30 minutes per day from three to five days a week.

Clear instructions should include:

1. continuity (being systematic)
2. instructions
3. engagement
4. oriented success
5. promotion of students' achievement

Guidelines on clear instructions  include teacher's modeling,  guided practice, and academic feedback (Doabler & Fien, 2013).

Self-monitoring is a strategy that engages  students in planning, performing and monitoring the abilities.

## 2.1 Strategies that include technology

Technology and it's effective integration as a powerful tool, aim to empower students in gaining and building new knowledge. The use of technology is categorized in two directions: technology that overcomes learning difficulties such as calculating machines. Second, technology that improves guiding strategies and comes to the aid of teachers such as digital tables. In this way we can make a difference between advanced and less advanced technology. Advanced technology includes the use of computers and software's, while less advanced technology

includes all those materials that do not require a high monetary cost of equipment such as computers and so on.

## 3.0 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

What are the most effective strategies for helping students with learning difficulties?

Do we have changes in learning under the implementation of the strategies:

1. Guidelines by peers
2. Clear instructions
3. Self-monitoring
4. Use of technology?

## 4.0 METHODOLOGY

This study is qualitative and the instruments used are semi-structured interview and checklist. Three focus groups were created to achieve the purposes of the study and to maximize the time : a focus group with teachers, a focus group with a psychologist and a focus group with children (focus group with children used as its element the expression through the game). In total, a sample of n = 21 individuals was included, from this sample we had n = 5 teachers, n = 5 psychologists and n = 11 children. The average age of the teachers involved was 39.3 years and the psychologists age was 28 years old. Among the children we had: six children of seven years old; four children of eight years old; a child of nine years old and one of this children didn't participate in this study.

This research was implemented at the center of the foreign language "Sidi Education" in Elbasan , due to the technological efforts of this centre.

### 4.1 Research design

The focus group was used to understand more about the strategies used in learning difficulties. It was also used to identify students that have learning problems. Another important aim of this study was to understand the co-operation between the psychologist and the teacher and the intervention strategies they applied (if there was one) in terms of managing and dealing with cases as a multidisciplinary team. Regarding to children, they tried to understand more about the ways and tools used in the classroom and the easy access in information.

Except the gathering information phase , this research was focused even in the intervention element.

Teachers were asked to develop this activities in the classrooms centers ( to create environments similar with classrooms ) an ordinary classroom hour, just as an ordinary school day . The role of the psychologist in this case was to highlight all the problems that children showed in the acquisition of new material according to their checklists .The children selection was casual. The results were collected and kept separately to be reviewed again during the data processing                                                                         phase.

This phase was followed by the phase in which teachers and psychologists group got instructions that were part of the intervention as a facilitating element in the learning process. After that, it was required that the same lesson to be developed again and to see the effects of the instruction on absorbing information.

Beside the stage of receiving information through qualitative methods in further meetings, some attempts were made to apply the suggested interventions as mitigating factors in the assimilation and integration of school materials.

Psychologists continued to keep track of the data through the checklist.

Through the focus group, students' knowledge and difficulties were tested at each of the stages.

The element that served to differentiate between students who encountered difficulties against those who had easier access to the new material was the element of time and accuracy.

The children engaged in four strategies, and then the most preferred strategy was chosen.

There was no control group in the study to compare the interference, but this was attempted to be over comed through the pre-test and post-test phase.

## 5.0 RECRUITMENT AND DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES

For the purpose of this study, Sidi education center asked a permission was to conduct this research. The psychologists' study's announcement was distributed to one of the social networks. The announcement explained voluntary participation and confidentiality as well as the right to withdraw at any point that was considered reasonable by the participants. For participants who would accept to be part of the study and follow it up to the end, the Sidi Education Center would provide a one-month course for them or their relatives who ranged from 6-18 year olds. The children were recruited through Sidi Education Center, and they were not previously involved in the teaching process. Children had permission from their parents. The teachers involved were teachers who attended this center.

## 6.0 DATA ANALYSIS PROCESS

The data collected was divided into two groups: the data collected before the instruction phase and the data collected after the instruction phase. For further specifics this two groups were divided into four categories: knowledge of interventions; use of knowledge on interventions, (instruction) intervention, and collection of data after intervention.

**6.1 Study extension on time**. This study was conducted in three days:

1- Pre-testing

2- Intervention

3- Posttest

The study was conducted in October and respectively on dates: 28, 29, 30.

4

Data analysis began immediately after their collection.

**6.2 Data Analysis**

**a- Data collected in the first phase**

1- Difficulties in storing information a few minutes after it was given. This featured in boys and girls as part of the study

2- Difficulties in keeping the attention to new information manifested more when information was not accompanied by incentives.

3-extra time needed to accomplish the assignment, which reduces the academic performance of the student.

4-Lack of cooperation in accomplishing group tasks.

5-Need to structure behavior in order to increase the quality of performance.

6- There was no difference between girls and boys in the type of behaviors observed. The difference was observed in the intensity of behavior and the accuracy of the reaction.

7- When teachers used helping tools, the performance was higher

**b- Data collected after interference**

1-Students after using peer instructions received more interest in new information.

2- There was an increase of information storage and the ability to associate information with each other

3-Auxiliary tools such as billboards increased concentration skills

4-Girls showed up more self-monitoring skills than boys.

5- Structuring the strategies was more effective than in the case where there was no clear order or a concrete starting point and standard for their application.

**7.0 CONCLUSIONS**

1- Teachers had knowledge on strategies used on learning difficulties but not on structuring them.

2- The strategies used were effective in terms of absorbing the material provided.

3- Use of peers affects positively the child's approach to the materials given.

**8.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. A credible and valid child identification, no later than five or six years of age, in kindergarten or first class, for which it is predicted to fail or have difficulties in learning.

2. Evaluating these children

3. Realize a successful intervention so they will not face the failure.

4. Differentiated guidance to help teachers reflect and think about the level of students' readiness, interests, and learning style during learning planning.

5. A review of how to use students' assessment for the instructions.

6. Trainings on how to use small group instruction in all content areas to provide individualized guidance.

7. Support and development in peer circle and guidance on strategies to increase the use of these practices in inclusive classes.

8. Parental involvement strategies to increase parents' participation in education.

9. Integrated training for pre-service teachers combining them into the general education disciplines and special education teacher education programs in a philosophy that describes a program and highlights the importance of cooperation, curriculum differentiation, and pedagogy.

**9.0 STUDY LIMITS**

The phenomenon of identifying learning difficulties, special education needs, inclusion of students in common classes, etc., are develop in a socio-cultural context determined by concrete and limited social-cultural factors in an assigned region and with a corresponding sample. For these reasons, it is expected that the study will recommend not so "objective" conclusions with a limited validity to be expressed in the ideas, attitudes, parents' expectations for their children, as well as expectations for the school in general and teachers in particular. The perception of parents, teachers, and students is different to inclusive education; it depends on social culture, family culture, education, the level of knowledge and the level of prejudice.

**REFERENCES:**

Brander, K., (2004). Socioeconomic status-Effects and implications for special education placement. University of Wisconsin-Stout.

Champion, 1998; The British Journal of Developmental Disabilities Vol. 50, Part 2, JULY 2004, No. 99, pp. 78-88 "" Low birth-weight infants and the importance of early intervention: Enhancing mother-infant interactions. A literature review
Chilton, M., M. Chyatte& Beaux, J. (2007). The negative effects of poverty & food insecurity on child development. Philadephia, PA USA.

Elwan. A., (1999). Poverty and disability. A survey of the literature.

Farah. M. J., K.G. Noble& Hurt. H. Poverty, privilege and brain development: empirical findings and ethical implications. Univ of Pennsylvania.

Gonzalez, V. "The Role of Socioeconomic and Sociocultural Factors in Language-Minority Children's Development: An Ecological Research View," Bilingual Research Journal 25, (1&2), Winter/Spring 2001, 1-30. Used by permission of the publisher, the National Association for Bilingual Education (NABE).
Huffman.L., S.L. Mehlinger&kerivan, A.S. (2000). Risk factors for academic and behavioral problems at the beginning of school.

Korenman. S., J.E. Miller& Sjastad.J.E, (1994). Long-term poverty and child development in the united states: results from the NLSY. Institute for research on poverty. Discussion paper no. 1044-94.

Lucchese, F., & Tamis-LeMonda, C. S. (2007). Fostering language development in children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Encyclopedia of Language and Literacy Development (pp. 1-11). London, ON: Canadian Language and Literacy ResearchNetwork. Retrieved from: http://www.literacyencyclopedia.ca/pdfs/topic.php?topId=229

Malekpour.M., (2004). Low birth-wight infants and the importance of early intervention: enhancing Mother –infant interaction. A literature review. The British Journal of developmental disabilities. Vol. 50. Part. 2. July. No. 99. Pp. 78-88.

Melmed. M (2007). Statement of zero to three policy center. U.S house of representatives.

Park, J., A.P. Turnbull& Rutherford turnbull III, H. (2002). Exceptional Children-impacts of poverty on quality of life in families of children with disabilities. Volume 68. No.2, pp. 151-170. The university of Kansas.

Peterson, Kristen, "A Qualitative Study of Instructional Strategies Used by Elementary General Education Teachers in Inclusive Classrooms" (2011).Dissertations.Paper 448.

Powney, J., H. Malcolm& Lowden, K. (2000). Health and attainment- A brief review of recent literature. The Scottish council for research in education.

Richter.L., A. Dawes& deKadt. J. (2009). Promoting mental health in scare resource contexts. Chapter 6. http://www.hsrcpress.ac.za

Segal, E.A. & Niles, M.D. (forthcoming). In Broussard, A & Joseph, A. (eds.).Family Poverty in Diverse Contexts. Haworth Press. Publish date 2008.
Seifert.K& Sutton. R. (2009). Educational psychology. 2nd ed. Global Text Project, Jacobs Foundation, Zurich, Switzerland.

Slack, K.Sh., Holl, J.L., McDaniel, M., J. Yoo & Bolger.K. (2008). Understanding the risks of child neglect: an exploration of poverty and parenting characteristics. Univ. of Winsconsin Madison. http: //cmx.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/9/4/395.

Stricker , G &  Widiger , Thomas A . ( 2003 ). HANDBOOK of PSYCHOLOGY VOLUME 8 CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY John Wiley & Sons, Inc., Hoboken, New Jersey.

Tamo, A. 2007. "Këshillimi dhe psikoterapia" fq.201. Pegi, Tiranw.
Totsika. V & Sylva.K., (2004). Vol.9. No. 1 pp 25-35. The home observation for measurement of the environment revisited. Department of educational studies. Univ. of  Oxford.

Zorn, D & Noga, J. (2004) family poverty and its implications for school success. University of Cincinnati, Evaluation Services center.