

READING DIFFICULTIES: CONCEPT, CHARACTERISTICS, TYPES, CHALLENGES AND REMEDIATIONS

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Abstract

Reading difficulties are among the major learning challenges affecting pupils' academic achievement and the overall academic development. Dyslexia is one of the most common forms of specific reading difficulties and is characterized by persistent difficulties in accurate and fluent word recognition, decoding, spelling, phonological processing, and, in some cases, reading comprehension. This paper examines the the concept, characteristics, types, challenges and remediation of reading difficulties with particular emphasis on pupils with dyslexia. The paper discusses reading difficulties as problems that may affect learners' ability to acquire and apply essential reading skills despite having adequate opportunities for classroom instruction. It further examines common characteristics, including difficulties with letter sound recognition, vocabulary development, reading fluency, memory, comprehension monitoring, generalization and independent learning. The paper concludes that early identification, appropriate instructional support, systematic intervention and collaboration among teachers, parents and other professionals are essential for improving reading outcome and educational participation of pupils with reading difficulties.

Keywords: Reading Difficulties, Concept, Characteristics, Challenges, Remediations

Introduction

Dyslexia as a specific learning disability that is neurological 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 the growth of vocabulary and background knowledge. It is important to teach an individual with dyslexia effective methods. Intervention includes identification of words, spelling of words, and fluent reading skills intervention strategies used for pupils with dyslexia. Only language-based activities are not the part of the intervention but it also accommodates students with dyslexia. Modification allowed students to attempt verbal exams as a substitute of transcribed exams. Meditation is also used to overcome difficulties of students with dyslexia such as confidence and self-esteem.

The most common type of reading disability is dyslexia. However, dyslexia is a reading, writing and spelling disorder that can involve difficulties in visual or auditory perception.

These children need thorough redemption screening and intervention to improve their reading. The importance of early identification in pre-readers of a very young age of the precursors of dyslexic-type symptoms in order to facilitate the development of compensatory reading strategies. There are several types of dyslexia that can affect the child's ability to spell as well as read. These include: trauma dyslexia, Primary dyslexia and secondary or developmental dyslexia. However, based on the above background that, the paper sought to examine the concept, characteristic, types, challenges and remediation of reading difficulties.

Concept of Reading Difficulties

Reading plays a vital role in ones' success in school. It is one of the most important skills in English an individual needs to master. It is a pre-requisite of all learning areas. It serves as a gateway to every student to learn the different subjects because when a student has a difficulty in reading, he may encounter also difficulties in all subject areas. It should be noted that the terms reading disability/difficulty, reading disorder, and dyslexia are used interchangeably in the literature to refer to individual experiencing problems with reading. Specific reading difficulty is the best-known, and most studied form of specific learning difficulty. This is the condition that many refer to as 'dyslexia'. The most common type of reading disability is dyslexia. 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 the growth of vocabulary and background knowledge. Lonigan and Shanahan (2008), pointed out that reading difficulties can affect the progress of up to 30 per cent of children in some schools, and the problem is not confined to children with disabilities or with other identified special needs. Earlier on, the National Center for Educational Statistics (2005), stated that nearly 40% of the general school population experience difficulty in reading. It is interesting to note that Miller, Sanchez and Hynd, (2003), Willingham (2005), asserted that children with dyslexia have brains that operate differently from the brains of children without dyslexia. However, the International Dyslexia Association (2012), concluded that dyslexia and other related learning disorders couldn't be cured. Appropriate instruction promotes reading success and alleviates many difficulties associated with dyslexia.

Types of Reading Difficulties

The types of Reading difficulties ranges from mild to severe, and including surface and phonological (Ho, 2004). Goswami, Thomson, Richardson, Stainthorp, Hughes, and Rosen, (2002), emphasises that the ability to detect rhyme forms in speech is part of the normal development of pre-reading skills in young children in different languages and this ability can be less evident in some reading difficulties. Longitudinal studies in Sweden, which followed

young children with dyslexia through to adulthood, have provided evidence that early phonological deficits can persist through to adulthood (Svensson & Jacobson, 2006).

According to the National Institute for Neurological Disorder and Stroke (2010) there are several types of dyslexia that can affect the child's ability to spell as well as read. These include: Trauma dyslexia, Primary dyslexia and secondary or developmental dyslexia.

- i. Trauma dyslexia. This type of dyslexia occurs after some form of brain trauma or injury to the area of the brain that controls reading and writing.
- ii. Primary dyslexia: This type of dyslexia is a dysfunction, rather than damage to, the left side of the brain (cerebral cortex) and does not change with age. Individual with this type is rarely able to read above primary four. Primary dyslexia is passed in family lines through their genes. It is found more often in boys than in girls (Czepita & Lodygowska, 2006).
- iii. Secondary dyslexia: This type of dyslexia is said to be caused by hormonal development during the early stages of foetal development. Developmental dyslexia diminishes as the child matures. It is also more common in boys than girls. From the foregoing, dyslexia may affect several different functions.
- iv. Visual dyslexia is characterized by number and letter reversal and the ability to write symbols in the correct sequence.
- v. Auditory dyslexia involves difficulty with sounds of letters. The sounds are perceived as jumbled or not heard correctly.

Characteristics of Pupils with Dyslexia

Though dyslexia varies from person to person, common characteristics among people with dyslexia are difficulty with spelling; phonological processing (manipulation of sound) and rapid visual-verbal responding despite having normal intelligence. Other notable characteristics of dyslexia include difficulty copying from the board or a book can also suggest problems. There may also be disorganization of written work. According to International Dyslexia Association (2012), pupils with a reading disability may experience difficulty in any combination of the following areas:

- a) Difficulty Mastering Letter Sounds and Vocabulary: Students with reading disabilities tend to have difficulty learning letter sounds, combinations of sounds, and vocabulary words.
 - b) Difficulty Monitoring Performance: pupils with reading disabilities are not usually adept at monitoring their own understanding of reading material.
 - c) Failure to Apply Strategies Learned in a Variety of Contexts: The strategies that support successful reading vary in subject/content areas and also vary from one assignment to the next. Reading a textbook, for example, requires different strategies and skills than reading a story. Pupils with reading disabilities do not adjust their strategies accordingly.
 - d) Difficulty in Generalization: Pupils with reading disabilities have difficulty transferring concepts that have been learned in one context to another context.
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- e) Memory Problems: Pupils with reading disabilities often demonstrate challenges with memory and have difficulty retaining their understanding from reading material.
- f) Over-Dependency: pupils with reading disabilities tend to be over-dependent on others for direction in their learning. This impacts reading assignments, which tend to be individual assignments.
- g) Approaching a Task: Pupils with reading disabilities may have a history of limited success or repeated failure, and they may not approach a challenging learning task with a positive attitude.

Different Methods of Teaching Reading to Pupils with Dyslexia

Various authors state that, just like as there is no single type of child in the reading classroom, there is also not only one approach to the teaching of reading, but rather instruction needs to match the learners' academic needs. Russell and Santoro (2007), maintained that carefully designed instruction is required to help learners at risk of academic failure to attain grade-level expectations.

There are a number of different teaching methods which include small group instruction, student-centered/constructivist approach, project-based learning and Montessori from which teachers can choose. However, the question of which is the most effective continues to concern teachers. According to Gonzalez, Minaya-Rowe, and Yawkey (2016), all methods have shown some success, a number of which are summarized below.

1. Phonics is a method whereby "the speech is broken into individual sounds and represented letters"
2. The look and say or whole-word method of reading.
3. The whole language method of reading, underlying whole-language are the unity and interrelationship of oral language, reading and writing. Unlike the phonic method, .
4. Combining phonics and whole-language in teaching reading Proponents of combining the phonics and whole-language approaches,.

Runo, (2010), highlighted the following five essential components of effective reading instruction:

6. Phonemic awareness- instruction designed to teach learners the ability to focus on, manipulate and break apart the sounds (or phonemes) in a word.
7. Phonics- instruction designed to help readers understand and apply the knowledge of how letters are linked to sounds (phonemes) to form letter-sound (grapheme-phoneme) correspondences and spelling pattern
8. Fluency- instruction primarily through guided oral reading that reinforces the ability to read orally with speed, accuracy, and proper expression.
9. Vocabulary- instruction both explicit and implicit in order to increase both oral and print knowledge of words, a critical component of comprehension and reading.

10. Comprehension- instruction that teaches students to actively engage with, and derive meaning from the text they read (adapted from section III: conceptual framework and research foundation).

According to Nell, Nell and Hugo (2012), phonemic awareness is the ability to hear, identify and manipulate individual sounds in spoken words and the specific understanding that they consist of sequenced phonemes (speech sounds that influence meaning) blended together. Through phonemic awareness, learners understand that letters represent sounds in words, which is fundamental to emergent literacy. Phonemic awareness is that speech consists of a sequence of sounds and being able to recognize these individual sounds, how they make words and how these words can make sentences. Reading requires the learners to see the symbols, their shape and their visual sequence. Phonics involves associating the speech sounds of letters with their written symbols. It is a method of teaching learners to read. Phonic skills in the Foundation Phase include letter identification, segmenting and blending Nell, Nell and Hugo (2012).

According to the Department of Education and Skills (DFES) (2004), 'Phonics' refers to the sounds in words and the symbols (letters of the alphabet) used to represent them. Phonics instruction is designed to help readers understand and apply the knowledge of how letters are linked to sounds to form letter-sound correspondences and spelling patterns. Fluency instruction, primarily guided through oral reading reinforces the ability to read orally with speed, accuracy and proper expression. Reading is described as fluent when learners phrase correctly, and use correct pronunciation without any omissions, repetitions, substitutions, inversions or insertions, word guessing or voicing. Automaticity is necessary for reading fluency. When teaching fluency, one starts with the texts that are too easy for the learner that he or she understands.

Nel, Nel and Hugo (2012), described vocabulary instruction as teaching about words and their uses, giving learner's time to think about what they are learning as well as using complex words and enhancing language production and output. The aim of teaching vocabulary is to support learners in their thinking and to articulate this to other people. Reading will not be successful for learning if there is no comprehension. Stated that comprehension is the most difficult part to teach in primary schools, and teachers need to use a "gradual-release-of-responsibility" approach. When teaching reading comprehension, the responsibility of comprehending must move slowly from the teacher to the learner. Comprehension instruction teaches learners to actively engage with and derive meaning from the text as they read Lucy (2009).

Challenges of Handling Pupils with Dyslexia

Teachers face a lot of challenges while handling students with reading difficulties. The purpose of reading is comprehension and many pupils with reading difficulties lack that aspect of comprehension which poses a big problem to teachers trying to teach them. Learners with reading disabilities have problems with reading and spelling and find comprehension a

challenge. They also find it difficult to transfer their thoughts to paper when answering comprehension questions. According to Ozoji, Unachukwu, and Kolo (2016), other challenges associated with handling pupils with dyslexia span emotional, social and academic spheres. These problems tend to effect school success in children as well as adversely affect their levels of confidence when among peers or those who can judge them:

- 1) **Emotional Problem:** Often pupils with dyslexia become withdraw in the classroom, particularly in situations where by the teacher is ill-equipped with the requisite training to handle children of such nature. Pupils with dyslexia often get frustrated, confused and embraced in school and at times might disengage from the learning experience due to their inability to cope at tasks seemingly easy for their classmates to perform.
- 2) **Social Problems:** Ostracism is one huge monster feared by students with dyslexia. Because a great majority of teachers have no training in either special education or educational psychology, as they should, they stimulate unwelcoming behaviors from the classmates of students with dyslexia through their negative comments about their abilities. When normally developing pupils imbibe the criticizing habit from their teachers, they tend to be more frequent abusers of their less able peers.
- 3) **Academic Problems:** In the school setting pupils with dyslexia, particularly in the developing world, do not receive interventions that would enable them learn successfully. Due to absence of or improper diagnosis of LD, these pupils are made to contiguously develop alongside their peers, facing tests together without extra time allotted to them in order to allow them fully process the test questions. In an educational system that has an ability-contingent academic reward system, students with dyslexia would lag behind in terms of formative assessment scores (Ozoji, et al, 2016).

Strategies for Enhancing Reading Comprehension

Lerner (2009), and the National Reading Panel (2000), recognized several strategies that had a solid scientific basis of instruction for improving reading comprehension including:

- i. Comprehension monitoring: Pupils learn how to be aware of their understanding of the material.
- ii. Cooperative thinking: Pupils learn reading strategies together.
- iii. Use of graphic and semantic organizers, including story maps: Students make graphic representations of the materials to assist their comprehension.
- iv. Question answering: Pupils answer questions posed by the teacher and receive immediate feedback.
- v. Question generation: Pupils ask themselves questions about various aspects of the story.
- vi. Story structure: Pupils are taught how to use the structure of the story as a means of helping them recall story content in order to answer questions about what they have read.

- vii. Summarization: Pupils are taught to integrate ideas and to generate ideas and to generalize from the text information.

Willingham (2005), suggested that pupils with reading difficulties require a different type of comprehension instruction than typical learners and that just as students with reading difficulties need explicit structure instruction to learn word-recognition skills, they need explicit, highly structured instruction to learn reading comprehension skills. Williams emphasizes a “Themes Instruction Programme”, which consists of a series of twelve 40 minutes lessons and each lesson is organized around a single story and is composed of five parts namely: pre-reading discussion on the purpose of the lesson and the topic of the story that will be read, reading the story, discussion of important story information using organized (schema) questions as a guide, identification of a theme for the story, stating it in general terms so that it is relevant to a variety of stories and situations and finally practice in applying the generalized theme to real-life experiences.

Remediation of Reading Difficulties for Pupils with Dyslexia

Karanja (2010), and Vicki and Dana (2012) , discussed five premises that cognitive science previously identified as basic to teaching content area of reading skills. They are:

1. Constructing the Meaning of a Text: A reader actively constructs meaning of a text by making seemingly logical and deliberate connections between an existing knowledge and new information about a topic.

2. The Role of Prior Knowledge in Learning: The most important variable in learning with texts is a reader’s prior knowledge. By activating prior knowledge and generating the learner’s interest, a teacher creates a context for students to approach reading with purpose and anticipation (Vicki and Dana, 2012).

3. The Reader’s Comprehension is Dependent on Metacognition: Metacognition is the ability to think about and control the thinking process before, during, and after reading. Students who have learned metacognitive skills can plan and monitor their comprehension, adapting and modifying their reading accordingly (Vicki and Dana, 2012).

5. Reading and Writing are Integrally Related: Many researchers have agreed that reading and writing are naturally connected, even though there has been a debate on the specific connections among them. However, each involves generating ideas, logically organizing them, revisiting them several times until they make sense and then revising or rethinking them as needed (Vicki and Dana, 2012).

6. Learning Increases with the Collaboration of Students: This is however; they believe that students learn by interacting with others in the classroom, by generating and asking questions, and by discussing their ideas freely with the teacher or one another. Conversation provides an opportunity for the speaker to deepen his or her understanding of an idea or topic (Vicki & Dana, 2012). Moreover, there are some other intervention techniques used in teaching students with reading difficulties which are modeling/demonstration, prompting, correcting errors,

providing plenty of opportunities to respond, repeated practice, and shaping and reinforcing responses. As each instructional component is systematically implemented.

7. Modeling/Demonstration: Children of all ages observe various behaviors exhibited by adults and peers and engage in imitating that behavior. Therefore, it is important for parents and teachers to model appropriate reading behavior (Mc Curdy, 2007). This listening while reading technique is described below under developing fluency skills. Although modeling proficient reading is critical and can be very influential, it cannot be assumed that this behavior will be imitated. Therefore, teachers need to demonstrate (make explicit) reading proficiently so students learn how to perform this behavior. Parents and teachers are regarded as role model in most instances to their children.

8. Prompting and Error Correction: Verbal prompts can be used to help students read words correctly. Verbal prompts can often be used as a way to scaffold (i.e., providing assistance and gradually removing that assistance as skills are independently executed) appropriate reading behaviors (Carnine, Silbert, Kameenui, & Tarver, 2014). For instance, when a student encounters a word he or she does not know how to read, the teacher may verbally prompt the student to attempt to read the word by saying, “now, let’s examine the word carefully. The word begins with the letter m and the m makes the sound of ” Then the teacher allows the student to articulate the sound. Verbal prompts like this are provided until the students can read the word correctly. Verbal prompts of this nature are usually faded when the student becomes more proficient at reading words and using word attack strategies for attempting to read unknown words to him or her.

9. Opportunities to Respond/Repeated Practice: Incorporating judicious review of skills and content that has previously been taught is one way to prompt students to repeatedly practice skills so they are maintained over time (Carnine, Silbert, Kameennui & Tarver, 2014). When educators create opportunities to repeatedly practice skills, they must ensure that students are repeatedly practicing emitting correct reading responses, as all too often emitting the inaccurate reading of words becomes habit. Therefore, students’ performance on practice exercises needs careful monitoring, initially, at the very least. Careful monitoring is vital to any given task to be successfully accomplished.

10. Shaping/Reinforcement: Reinforcing appropriate behaviors strengthens that behavior. This is certainly the case for reading behaviors. When children are beginning to learn to read and apply strategies to read words accurately and comprehend text, they may need to be provided with reinforce in successive approximations to emitting correct responses. Providing reinforce in successive approximations shapes students’ reading behaviors toward making accurate responses. It lets students know the aspects of the task they are completing correctly. For instance, students may make some letter–sound correspondences of a word such as saying /sk/ correct for the word skip. They should be told which aspect of the response is correct so they are clear about this and will focus their attention on the aspects they are unsure about or

have yet to master. Motivational spirits certainly inculcate positive reading behaviour to the pupils despite its disadvantages.

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