Chapter 2
Specific Learning Disabilities and Psychosocial Difficulties in Children

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ABSTRACT

Children with specific learning disorders (SLDs) exhibit academic difficulties disproportional to their intellectual capabilities. A significant percentage of school-aged children worldwide are diagnosed with specific learning disabilities, with dyslexia being the most common. In Greece, epidemiological data propose that 50% of children in special education schools are diagnosed with learning disabilities, and

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80% with reading difficulties. Children with SLD exhibit both internalized, such as depressive and anxiety disorders, self-esteem issues, eating and sleep difficulties, and externalized problems, including difficulties in socializing, developing friendships, and delinquent behavior. Moreover, research has shown that children with learning disabilities have an average (or above average) intelligence, and their poor academic performance is due to their lack of effective learning strategies. Concerning cognitive deficiencies, research suggests that no specific deficit is to fault; however, common deficits in children with SLDs are phonological processing and working memory.

INTRODUCTION

The term Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD) refers to deficits that generally affect a person's academic ability. Specifically, they concern difficulties in reading, writing and arithmetic that are not caused by developmental, neurological, sensory, or motor disorders, mental disorders, or lack of teaching at the proper age (Bonti et al, 2020; Cortiella, & Horowitz, 2014; Nicolson & Fawcett, 2011; Reddy, Alku, & Rao, 2019; Sofologi, 2014; Sorrenti et al., 2019; Stanford & Delage, 2019). Children with Learning Disabilities have typical intelligence but show deficits in reading (Dyslexia) and/or mathematics (Dyscalculia) (Bonti, Kamari, Kougioumtzis, Theofilidis, & Sofologi, 2020; Kakia & Kougioumtzis, 2016; Nicolson et al., 2011; Reddy et al., 2019; Sofologi, 2014) and writing (Dysgrafia) (Nicolson et al., 2011) and there is usually comorbidity with other disorders that involve attention, language, and behavior (Cortiella et al., 2014). According to Selikowitz (2012), Special Learning Disabilities can be defined as *"*an unexpected and unexplained condition that affects a child of average, or above average intelligence, characterized by a significant delay in one or more areas of learning*"* (Selikowitz, 2012, pp. 4). The diagnosis of the above-mentioned disorder is based on low performance on one or more standardized tests of language related to the comprehension, or expression of language (Stanford et al., 2019).

Difficulties linked to Specific Learning Disorders (SLD), are the result of cognitive deficits which include difficulties in attention, problems in memorizing, and poor speed to process knowledge. They usually lead to inaccuracies in reading or slow reading in spite of the student putting a great amount of effort, poor reading comprehension skills, written expression without precision and clarity, number facts appear difficult to remember, and mathematical reasoning which lacks accuracy (Stanford et al., 2019). These deficits arise due to disorders in specific psychological processes, and are of neurological, biological (Sofologi, 2014; Xia, Hancock, & Hoeft, 2017) and congenital origins (Reddy et al., 2019).