

RESEARCH ARTICLE	Reading Difficulties and Pedagogical Treatments	
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<b>Abstract</b> This study examines certain didactic strategies that support addressing reading difficulties among learners—strategies that teachers can implement in the classroom, independent of orthophonic intervention, which is itself an essential stage in the treatment process. This research proposes practical solutions for teachers to mitigate reading difficulties that may hinder academic achievement and obstruct successful learning outcomes. Reading is a central activity and serves as the gateway to other linguistic competencies; However, reading difficulties are not necessarily caused by problems with intelligence, hearing, or vision. Most children with reading difficulties can succeed in school with special education or a specialized educational program. Emotional support also plays an important role. We addressed this topic through a research plan that consisted of an introduction, then a presentation of the nature of learning difficulties and their types. We also addressed the concept of reading and learning difficulties and stopped at the symptoms accompanying reading difficulties and the factors causing them, whether physical, psychological, social or educational, It can be difficult to recognize signs of reading difficulties before a child starts school, but some early signs may indicate a problem, and the teacher may be the first to notice. The severity varies, but the condition often becomes apparent when a child begins to learn to read. Then we presented a group of educational strategies to address reading difficulties. These are strategies that help the teacher within the department, who can apply them according to the available schedule and in line with the curriculum. Talking about reading difficulties, is an important educational, and teaching, issue that requires concerted efforts to identify its causes and ways to treat it, in order to avoid potential complications, including: - Exacerbation of other learning difficulties, Since reading is a basic skill for most academic subjects, the affected child becomes in a bad position in most classes and may face difficulty in keeping up with his peers. - Social problems. If one of the reading difficulties is not treated, it may lead to a decline in self-confidence, behavioral problems, anxiety, aggressive behavior, and isolation from friends, relatives, and teachers. - Problems in puberty. The inability to read and understand can prevent children from reaching the level expected of them during their growth. This can cause negative educational, social, and economic effects in the long term. Through this research, we have reached a set of results that can be enriched in other works, and can be applied to a sample of learners with reading difficulties, to determine the extent of their effectiveness and efficiency. Accordingly, this research is considered a contribution among several contributions that attempted to diagnose reading difficulties from an educational perspective, not from an orthophonic perspective, despite their intersection and complementarity in addressing issues of learning difficulties in general.		
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## Introduction

Teachers often attribute learners' inability to read a text, a sentence, or even pronounce words correctly to their low academic level, assuming they are not as proficient in reading as their peers. However, recent studies in psychology and speech therapy (orthophony) have demonstrated that these learners may excel in other subjects or activities requiring specific cognitive abilities, such as arithmetic or memorization. Thus, their difficulty with reading does not necessarily indicate a low academic level but may rather be a sign of a particular type of learning difficulty. In such cases, specialists must intervene to diagnose the condition, investigate its causes and complexity,

prescribe appropriate treatment, and facilitate the learner's reintegration with their peers to help them adapt naturally and effectively.

Among these learning difficulties, reading difficulties are the most prevalent, particularly among preschool-aged children and primary school students. In some cases, these challenges persist into later stages of education. Reading difficulties significantly hinder learners' academic progress and acquisition of knowledge and skills, as they often lead to psychological and educational challenges that negatively impact their overall learning experience.

### Study Problem:

The problem of this study can be formulated in the following main:

- What is meant by learning difficulties, and what are their types?
- What constitutes reading difficulties? Is there a distinction between reading difficulties and dyslexia?
- What are the educational strategies that contribute to reducing reading difficulties?

### 1. Learning Difficulties: Definition and Types

Language disorders, speech impairments, and learning difficulties are diverse terms used to describe the delay, disruption, or underdevelopment of one or more processes related to speech, language, reading, writing, arithmetic, or other academic subjects. These difficulties stem from psychological disabilities resulting from functional impairments in the brain's hemispheres, or from emotional and behavioral disturbances. They are not caused by intellectual disability, sensory deficits, or educational and cultural factors (Salem, El-Shahat, & Hassan, 2006, pp. 23–24).

Learning difficulties are classified into developmental and academic categories, as indicated by research and specialized literature:

- Developmental learning difficulties refer to *pre-academic processes*, which involve cognitive functions related to attention, perception, memory, thinking, and language (Al-Zayyat, 1998, p. 411).
- Academic learning difficulties, on the other hand, pertain to *academic cognitive performance* and include challenges related to reading, writing, spelling, written expression, and arithmetic (Al-Zayyat, 1998, p. 412).

Despite this distinction, there is a strong connection between developmental and academic learning difficulties. According to Fathi El-Zayat, *developmental difficulties form the foundation of an individual's cognitive mental activity. Consequently, any impairment or dysfunction in one or more of these processes inevitably leads to various academic difficulties (Ibid)*. This perspective, which frames the relationship between the two as one of cause and effect, is widely supported by researchers in the field.

Understanding academic learning difficulties through the lens of developmental difficulties has thus become a necessary prerequisite for accurate diagnosis and the development of effective intervention strategies for each specific challenge.

Among the various types of academic learning difficulties is dyslexia, which we will explore in the following section, seeking to identify didactic (instructional) strategies to alleviate this difficulty, alongside psychological or speech therapy interventions.

### 2. Reading and Reading Difficulties:

Reading is one of the four core linguistic competencies that must be acquired alongside the other language skills (listening comprehension, oral expression, and written expression). The concept of reading has evolved in parallel with advancements in research and theoretical approaches, giving rise to what is now known as "reading theories."

Reading holds a central place in educational curricula, as it is the key to acquiring knowledge. As a school activity, it serves as a means of communication between the reader (the learner) and the author, through a series of written symbols that are first recognized by the eye and then processed through a set of cognitive operations, such as comprehension, enabling the learner to *"extract the core idea contained in the written material, thereby contributing to the intellectual development of humanity as a whole"* (Al-Sayyid, 2011, p. 323). This comprehension allows the learner to engage actively with the text.

This highlights the significance of reading, not only in the life of the learner as a student but also in the lives of individuals, societies, and nations. Reading serves as a repository of human thought and a gateway to acquiring knowledge across various fields of life.

Given its fundamental role, teaching reading from the early stages of schooling has been a consistent practice in all educational systems. In primary education—regardless of the preparatory stage, which not all children may attend—

learners are trained in the basic reading habits and skills related to visual perception of letters, including their shapes, pronunciation in different forms (with short vowels such as fatha, damma, and sukun, as well as long vowels), and the recognition of words, objects, and meanings within the targeted learning context. This progression enables learners to read short sentences, gradually advancing to a more expanded stage of reading.

*"This stage is characterized by fostering a passion for reading, improving comprehension accuracy, developing independence in word recognition, fluency in oral reading, increasing reading speed, engaging with simple literary texts, informational passages, and stories, and building a substantial vocabulary repertoire (Al-Sayyid, 2011, p. 342)."*

The primary goal of school reading instruction is to foster linguistic competence. Therefore, it is essential that reading texts be rich in vocabulary and diverse in linguistic and stylistic structures. Additionally, reading instruction aims to equip learners with various strategies that enable them to engage with texts according to their specific reading purposes, as well as based on the genre and type of text, as we demonstrated in our first and second studies.

However, this represents the typical learning trajectory for a student without difficulties, whose cognitive abilities and psychological readiness facilitate effective reception, comprehension, and internalization of the reading content. When this is not the case, failure in reading occurs. If this failure persists and becomes a constant struggle, it may be classified as a form of learning difficulty, more specifically, a reading difficulty or dyslexia.

This raises the question: What exactly are these reading difficulties, and is there a distinction between reading difficulties and dyslexia?

Dyslexia is considered one of the most common forms of learning difficulties, manifesting in children from an early age, sometimes even before they start school. It often persists into the early years of formal education, depending on its type, severity, the timing of its diagnosis, and the subsequent intervention—or lack thereof.

Fathi El-Zayat defines dyslexia as: *"A developmental disorder, deficit, or difficulty with neurological roots, expressed in difficulties with learning to read and comprehending written verbal input in general, despite the presence of adequate intelligence, suitable teaching and learning conditions, and a stable cultural and social environment (Fathy Mostafa, 2007, p. 159)."*

According to this definition, dyslexia is characterized by:

- A disorder;
- Neurological developmental origins;
- Manifestations in difficulties learning to read and understanding written words;
- Occurrence despite the individual's normal intelligence, proper educational opportunities, and a stable socio-cultural environment.

El-Zayat thus diagnoses dyslexia as a neurologically based disorder, classifying it under developmental learning difficulties rather than academic learning difficulties. He further distinguishes between dyslexia and reading difficulties based on the severity of the disorder. He states:

*"The difference between dyslexia and reading difficulties lies in the degree of severity or intensity of the impairment. Dyslexia represents a more pronounced level of severity or deficit. Both, however, fall under the category of developmental difficulties with neurological and perceptual origins, although reading difficulties are often classified as academic difficulties in most Arabic and foreign literature (Fathy Mostafa, 2007, p. 159)."*

Children or learners with dyslexia or reading difficulties are identified based on their reading level, performance, and comprehension compared to their peers or classmates. In this regard, Al-Zayyat states: *"The expected level of reading and reading comprehension can be determined as the average level of the reference group to which the student belongs, or the average level of peers who are equivalent in chronological age, mental age, or grade level (Fathy Mostafa, 2007, p. 160)."* Accordingly, the teacher plays a crucial role in identifying learners with reading difficulties and subsequently informing their guardians to guide them toward specialists for appropriate intervention before the condition worsens.

As for the degree of complexity or severity, its classification, according to Al-Zayyat, depends on *"the extent of the discrepancy, divergence, or significant deviation between the actual level and the expected level (Fathy Mostafa, 2007, p. 160)."* The greater the degree of deviation from the normal average, the more it indicates the presence of what is termed dyslexia, whereas a lower or slight deviation suggests the existence of general reading difficulties.

### **3. Symptoms Associated with Reading Difficulties:**

The manifestations and symptoms of reading difficulties vary depending on each individual case. Specialists in psychology and speech therapy (orthophonists) identify different types of reading difficulties, including visual reading difficulties (visual dyslexia), auditory reading difficulties (auditory dyslexia), and difficulties related to written text comprehension, often referred to as (writing dyslexia). Without delving into the details of each type, the following is a summary of the most common symptoms generally observed in individuals with reading difficulties (Fathy Mostafa, 2007, p. 173):

- Deficiency in phonological awareness, meaning difficulty associating letters with their corresponding sounds.
- Difficulty perceiving the relationship between letter forms, their pronunciation, and their sounds, as well as encoding them—i.e., an inability to store visual representations of letter sounds during the reading process.
- Reversing letters, numbers, words, and syllables, along with confusion and an inability to distinguish between similar-looking letters.
- Distortion and confusion in processing the sequence and order of elements, as individuals with reading difficulties struggle to accurately pronounce speech sounds in their correct order and sequence.
- Correct pronunciation of individual sounds on occasion, but experiencing disruption when attempting to articulate complete words or sentences.
- Fragmentation of words into their individual letters or component sounds.
- Difficulty blending and integrating speech sounds to form coherent words and audible syllables.
- Omitting or dropping the endings of words.
- Repeating a word several times before managing to pronounce it correctly or grasp its meaning.
- Reversing or misinterpreting the perceptual meaning of words and their connotations.
- Inability to construct accurate mental images, often observable through prolonged pauses as the learner struggles to visualize what they are reading.

The aforementioned difficulties—alongside others that we could not cover here—require addressing their underlying causes as a first step toward treatment. Therefore, the teacher is responsible for reporting the case to the school administration so that appropriate measures can be taken. These may include summoning the parents or referring the learner to the school's psychological counselor, who would, in turn, direct the case to specialists. Identifying the causes is half the treatment process. However, the teacher can also employ certain strategies to mitigate these difficulties—a point we will explore later, following an examination of the key causes underlying reading difficulties.

#### **4. Factors Contributing to Reading Difficulties:**

A range of factors and causes influence the emergence of reading difficulties in learners and result in a decline in reading proficiency (where proficiency refers to the minimum acceptable level of reading performance expected from a child, as previously mentioned). Numerous studies and research investigations have highlighted this. After the initial diagnosis, which is a necessary step to confirm the presence of one or more learning difficulties in a child, a subsequent phase involves identifying the specific factors and causes that led to these difficulties. Based on this assessment, an appropriate intervention plan is devised. Through our examination of the subject, we found that these factors can be categorized into four groups:

##### **4.1 Physical Factors:**

Researchers identify these factors as:

Visual and auditory impairments, as “there is a relationship between vision and hearing in the acquisition of reading skills during the early stages (Al-Sayyid, 2011, p. 346),” a link confirmed by several studies, including Gray's study, which demonstrated that irregular eye and ear movements pose a challenge to children's acquisition of reading. Furthermore, a child who is unable to accurately distinguish between letters is not considered ready to learn to read (Al-Sayyid, 2011, p. 346).

Speech defects, as neurological functional disorders “lead to an inability to speak, and consequently, the inability to read stems from speech-related difficulties (Salem, El-Shahat, & Hassan, 2006, p. 147).”

Additionally, other health issues, such as respiratory system diseases and hereditary characteristics, are considered contributing factors.

##### **4.2 Psychological Factors:**

These include language disorders, cognitive process impairments such as attention, perception, and memory deficits, low intelligence levels, poor academic self-concept, and emotional difficulties experienced by the child (Salem, El-Shahat, & Hassan, 2006, p. 149).

### 4.3 Social Factors:

The social and cultural environment undeniably exerts both positive and negative influences on a child's self-confidence, which in turn impacts their cognitive abilities and psychological readiness. Researcher Mahmoud Ahmed Al-Sayed states that "children from higher socio-cultural backgrounds read better than others (Al-Sayyid, 2011, p. 345)." Social factors include the child's relationships with their father, mother, and siblings, as well as the dynamics within the family. It is important to note that this is not an absolute rule; exceptions always exist, though they are relatively rare.

### 4.4 Educational Factors:

According to researchers, educational factors primarily involve teaching methods used in reading instruction, the teacher's personality, class size and density, and school transfer policies (Salem, El-Shahat, & Hassan, 2006, p. 151). Additionally, from our perspective, there is the issue of the incompatibility between the educational content and the learners' age, cognitive abilities, or psychological readiness—especially for those diagnosed with dyslexia at an early age. This mismatch may lead to further learning difficulties, particularly in reading. Examples include the use of difficult, unfamiliar vocabulary and incomprehensible expressions, all of which can exacerbate the learner's fear of making mistakes in front of peers. This, in turn, exposes them to ridicule and bullying, ultimately pushing the learner, often unconsciously, to withdraw from reading activities, thereby worsening their condition.

These are the most significant underlying causes of reading difficulties. Since we have directed this research towards an academic and didactic approach, we have chosen, in the following section, to focus on instructional strategies for addressing "reading difficulties" rather than "dyslexia." This distinction is deliberate, as we refer here to difficulties that are not the result of specific developmental disorders requiring intervention by psychologists or speech therapists. Rather, we focus on difficulties that can be addressed through educational solutions.

## 5. Instructional Strategies for Addressing Reading Difficulties:

Instructional strategies are among the core components of the curriculum. They encompass all the methods and techniques employed by the teacher to deliver the learning content to students, with the aim of achieving the objectives set for the lesson or learning unit. This also includes the teaching aids used in the teaching and learning process, as well as the overall classroom environment—particularly the nature of communication between students and the teacher.

According to *Al-Manhal Educational Dictionary*, a didactic (instructional) strategy is defined as: "A systematically organized approach that outlines the course of the teaching-learning process in a way that enables the anticipation of desired outcomes and the planning of means to achieve them... Every didactic strategy is based on a common plan that includes the following components:

- Objectives to be achieved, grounded in specific starting points, including the learner and their prior knowledge.
- Means to achieve the objectives, encompassing content, methods, activities, and instructional aids.
- Evaluation of outcomes to obtain information about the teaching process or learning results, allowing for necessary adjustments (Ghrib, 2006, p. 874)."

Based on this definition, we conclude that instructional strategies represent the integration of objectives, methods, approaches, and evaluation. Moroccan researcher Abdelkarim Gharib states: "We proceed from the general to the specific, as we move from strategy to method, and finally to approach (Ghrib, 2006, p. 873)."

It appears that the concept of strategy overlaps with several other related terms, such as methodology, approach, and method. However, the researcher provides a distinction, as follows: "On the other hand, the relationship between instructional strategy and other related concepts is one of containment and inclusion—potential inclusion. For any instructional strategy to be realized, it is necessary to adopt an appropriate methodology capable of accommodating the intended concepts and objectives, in order to translate them into practical reality through a teaching method whose identity is only fully shaped by the stylistic touches unique to each teacher (Ghrib, 2006, p. 873)."

Accordingly, effective teaching, according to modern educational perspectives, "requires developing an integrated set of procedures and processes applicable to different types of learning [including]: selecting appropriate strategies for different tasks, monitoring the effectiveness of those strategies, and reviewing or replacing them when necessary (Richards, 2012, p. 176)."

From this, it becomes clear that instructional strategies are diverse and varied. In fact, they must be diversified based on the requirements of the teaching situation and aligned with the objectives set for the lesson. Jack

Richards affirms this by stating: “There may be a wide variety of learning strategies suited to specific groups of learners (Richards, 2012, p. 176).”

For instance, foreign language learners require specific strategies to achieve the desired learning outcomes, which differ from those applied to typical learners. Similarly, a teacher employs particular strategies for primary school learners that differ from those used with learners at other educational levels. The same applies to learners with learning difficulties, as well as those with linguistic intelligence, mathematical intelligence, and so on.

It is worth noting that selecting an appropriate and effective strategy requires the teacher to undertake certain steps and also “possess specific qualifications, including conducting a comprehensive assessment of the student and understanding the student’s learning style (Hashemi & Muhareme, 2015, p. 38).”

Understanding each learner’s individual learning style significantly contributes to guiding them toward the development of their personal skills. It also enables the teacher to design a strategy that considers individual differences and to plan tailored activities that ensure quality and effective learning for all students.

Reading strategies, on the other hand, refer to effective teaching and learning methods and techniques that promote the development of reading skills, which serve as a fundamental gateway to enhancing linguistic competence. Researcher Abdelrahman Touni classifies these strategies as follows:

- Reading planning strategies
- Word recognition strategies
- Word explanation strategies
- Strategies for understanding intra-sentence relationships
- Strategies for understanding intra-paragraph relationships
- Text comprehension strategies
- Text interaction strategies (Al-Touni, p. 119).

The aforementioned strategies are limited to those adopted by the teacher in the classroom with learners who do not experience any reading difficulties. These students follow a typical learning trajectory, engaging in reading and developing their skills naturally, in accordance with the lesson plan designed by the teacher, which includes various tools, strategies, and techniques.

For instance, within word recognition strategies, we find methods such as scanning familiar words as a whole and identifying words by recognizing parts of them (Al-Touni, p. 119). Similarly, among text comprehension strategies, we encounter practices like adjusting reading speed according to the reader’s purpose, classifying and organizing ideas, and inferring the general meaning from the text (Al-Touni, p. 121).

Failure to master such strategies often signals the presence of one or more reading difficulties in the learner.

- What, then, are the most effective strategies a teacher can adopt to assist this group of learners in overcoming their difficulties and rebuilding their self-confidence?
- Does improving reading skills in learners with reading difficulties require diversifying instructional strategies?

Just as modern reading strategies support typical learners, contemporary education and its theories have also provided teachers with a set of effective instructional strategies specifically designed to assist learners with reading difficulties. The following is an overview of the most significant of these strategies:

### 5.1 Rapid Reading Strategy:

Rapid reading helps learners overcome certain difficulties they encounter during reading, such as stumbling over words, slow word recognition, spelling out letters, or breaking up words and sentences. However, this strategy requires consistency and continuity to be effective.

The teacher can incorporate this activity during remedial or support sessions. Additionally, a brief period at the beginning of each lesson can be dedicated to rapid reading, provided that the selected texts are simple and easy. This ensures that learners do not become bored and that the activity does not consume excessive time.

### 5.2 Use of Pictures and Colored Cards:

This approach can aid learners in distinguishing between similar letters and words. The teacher prepares a variety of colored cards using distinctly different colors—for instance, representing the letter *s* in red and the letter *sh* in



green. Alternatively, the teacher might use gradient shades of the same color, such as dark red for *s* and light red for *sh*.

Additionally, the teacher can design language exercises involving coloring. For example, after distributing a set of letters, the teacher may ask students to color specific similar-looking letters as instructed (*ḥā'* and *khā'*, *dāl* and *dhāl*). The goal is to help learners overcome their difficulty in distinguishing between similar letters. It should be noted that this strategy is particularly suitable for the early years of schooling.

### **5.3 Role-Playing Strategy:**

The teacher can place learners in a social learning context (e.g., a play, a skit, a monologue), or encourage them to listen to or narrate a story while using facial expressions and appropriate gestures to illustrate difficult words.

Storytelling remains a traditional yet highly effective method for helping learners overcome many reading difficulties. It fosters correct pronunciation of letters and words, promotes the acquisition of new speech habits and expressions, and enhances oral fluency through listening and imitation. The teacher can vary the assigned roles each time to maintain engagement.

### **5.4 Collaborative Learning Strategy:**

This strategy involves dividing learners into small groups or workshops to complete assigned tasks. Its underlying principle is knowledge exchange within a cooperative group setting. It is preferable to place a learner with reading difficulties in a group consisting of peers with whom they share a positive relationship, ensuring a supportive and encouraging learning environment.

Examples of tasks the teacher might assign include:

- Individual and group oral reading: Regular oral reading of excerpts from various texts, poems, or songs helps learners overcome certain reading obstacles, such as hesitations, stuttering, and failure to observe punctuation marks.
- Choral reading: This refers to “students collectively reading the same text in unison, with the same rhythm, and at the same time (Ghrib, 2006, p. 563).” This approach reduces performance gaps, fosters learners’ confidence, and allows them to read fluently without drawing attention to their individual difficulties, thus alleviating feelings of embarrassment or anxiety.
- Organizing Competitions, Group Discussions, Riddles, or Language Games between two groups of learners to stimulate their thinking and enhance their linguistic intelligence.
- Providing Visual (Video Recordings) or Audio Materials (Recorded Tapes) through worksheets, where learners are asked to listen to the content and take brief notes or identify the main ideas presented in the audio texts. This approach trains learners to extract key ideas, understand meanings, and recognize the objectives and values conveyed in the text.
- Using Specialized Synonym and Antonym Dictionaries and assigning each group the task of finding synonyms or antonyms for unfamiliar or difficult-to-pronounce words.

It is important to note that the effectiveness of the aforementioned strategies depends on their consistent application and regular practice in the classroom. Furthermore, these strategies alone do not constitute a definitive or absolute solution to the reading challenges faced by learners. Continuous monitoring and intervention by specialists remain essential, as reading difficulties may escalate and become more severe, ultimately developing into cases of dyslexia.

## **Conclusion**

This research sought to shed light on one aspect of learning difficulties—namely, reading difficulties—which hinder learners from achieving academic progress and good performance, despite their excellence in other subjects and activities. Reading is the gateway to all other disciplines; it is the key to knowledge and science in general, and mastering it is a fundamental step toward achieving effective learning.

Among the key findings reached:

- Early detection of a child’s learning difficulty significantly contributes to its treatment, particularly reading difficulties, which parents may often overlook before their child starts school. This places the responsibility primarily on the teacher, who serves as the educator spending extended hours with the child during the school day. Even though the teacher may not be a specialist in educational psychology or speech therapy, they possess instructional and remedial solutions. These are reflected in the adoption of strategies and teaching methods capable of helping the learner overcome various forms of reading difficulties.

This, however, requires the teacher to first assess the learners and classify them into typical learners and those with learning difficulties. Doing so enables the teacher to select the appropriate strategy, following a didactic plan that

takes into account time, setting, teaching aids, methods, and techniques, all with the ultimate goal of achieving the intended educational objectives.

– Notifying parents and the school administration of the learner's condition is a necessary measure, no less important than instructional strategies. Supporting severe cases requires the intervention of specialists to diagnose the issue, identify its causes, and determine the factors that may either worsen or alleviate it. This process is accompanied by a remedial program that involves the concerted efforts of the psychologist, speech therapist, teacher, and parents.

– School-related reading difficulties often stem from social, psychological, or educational causes. Therefore, we have proposed a set of instructional strategies aimed at mitigating these difficulties. However, we emphasize the importance of early diagnosis and prompt reporting by either parents or the teacher, to ensure the necessary support is provided and appropriate intervention plans are developed—whether within the school setting or externally—in collaboration with specialists in the field.

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