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Learning Difficulties in the Primary Stage Between Reality and Expectation: A Comprehensive Field Study of Pedagogical, Diagnostic, and Therapeutic Challenges Among Primary School Learners in El Oued Province

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Keywords

Learning difficulties; primary education; Algeria; pedagogical intervention; diagnostic assessment; remedial strategies; field study; El Oued Province.

Abstract

Learning difficulties in the primary stage represent one of the most critical issues confronting contemporary educational systems, particularly in countries seeking to improve pedagogical quality and ensure equitable learning opportunities. In Algeria, learning difficulties have gained increasing attention due to their direct impact on students' cognitive, linguistic, and academic development. This study examines the educational, psychological, and pedagogical dimensions of learning difficulties among primary school learners in El Oued Province. It aims to identify the actual prevalence of these difficulties, diagnose their underlying causes, evaluate the therapeutic and remedial interventions used by teachers, and analyze the alignment between existing educational practices and the expectations of modern pedagogy. Drawing on theoretical foundations and a field investigation, the research explores the nature of learning difficulties, the factors contributing to their emergence, and the diagnostic mechanisms adopted in primary schools. It also identifies key pedagogical obstacles and evaluates the effectiveness of educational strategies implemented to support learners facing academic challenges. The findings highlight significant gaps between educational expectations and classroom reality, revealing the need for enhanced teacher training, improved diagnostic tools, and structured intervention programs. This study underscores the importance of early detection, individualized learning plans, and a collaborative approach involving teachers, psychologists, and parents to improve learning outcomes.

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Introduction:

The education sector in Algeria is among the sectors that strive to improve the educational process, enhance its effectiveness, and master the learner's linguistic acquisition while providing educational resources in schools and educational institutions to make up for deficiencies and raise the level of education. However, there are obstacles standing in the way of this desired goal—namely, the problem of learning difficulties.

This issue has imposed itself on parents as well as researchers in the field of education, in an effort to identify its nature and causes so that the learner can have an equal opportunity in education, showcase linguistic skills, intellec-

770 - www.imcra-az.org | Issue 12, Vol. 8, 2025

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tual creativity, and achieve objectives. This necessitates special attention to this group because they need psychological, educational, and pedagogical support to identify their strengths and weaknesses during the learning process and to address its negative effects by developing treatment strategies. Learners with learning difficulties are not hopeless cases; rather, they are a group that requires special care compared to the rest of the educational cohort they study with.

Basic Concepts:

1. The Concept of Learning Disabilities:

Before defining learning disabilities, we must refer to the first appearance of the term in the United States in 1962 when Samuel Kirk introduced it. He was the first to begin these efforts, which have continued until today among specialists in this field (Maamria, p. 42). Kirk defines learning disabilities as a “delay, disorder, or underdevelopment in one or more of the basic processes involved in understanding or using spoken or written language, which may manifest in listening, thinking, speaking, reading, writing, spelling, or arithmetic.” These difficulties result from psychological impairments caused by dysfunctions in the brain’s hemispheres or emotional and behavioral disorders, but they are not the result of mental retardation, sensory impairment, or cultural and educational factors (et al., 2006, pp. 23-24). This definition refers to developmental and academic learning difficulties encountered by the learner during instruction, although it overlooks the emotional aspect as a potential cause.

Ayat Abdel Majid defines learning disabilities as “referring to students who are unable to benefit from activities and information inside or outside the classroom and cannot reach the level of proficiency achieved by ordinary children due to deficiencies in basic processes such as perception, attention, and memory. They also suffer from deficits in basic skills such as motor abilities” (Maamria, p. 24).

This definition emphasizes motor skills as a cause, explaining why learners struggle to master language activities.

Saleh Haroun defines learning disabilities as “children who exhibit disorders in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or using spoken or written language, which may manifest in listening, thinking, speaking, reading, spelling, or arithmetic, and are due to causes not related to intellectual, hearing, or visual impairment” (et al., 2013, p. 17). He highlights psychological causes that affect learners’ linguistic and cognitive acquisition.

Michel Hafiz defines them as “a disorder in the basic mental or psychological processes, including attention, perception, concept formation, memory, and problem-solving, which manifests as an inability to learn reading, writing, and arithmetic, and consequently a deficiency in learning various academic subjects.”

All definitions indicate that learning difficulties stem from cognitive, psychological, and linguistic disorders affecting the child during learning and are not physical but academic in nature. They refer to a set of disorders that affect an individual’s ability to acquire and understand information and skills, hindering the learning process—especially in reading, writing, and mathematics. These difficulties are unrelated to intelligence but result from differences in brain information processing.

2. Definition of the Primary Stage:

The primary stage is the first step in the educational and intellectual journey and one of the most important in a learner’s life. It lasts five years and forms the first phase of compulsory basic education. It is a stage for acquiring foundational knowledge and developing basic competencies in oral and written expression, reading, mathematics, science, moral, civic, and Islamic education. Primary education also helps learners obtain appropriate upbringing, expand their understanding of self, time, and space, and acquire essential methodological knowledge that ensures successful progression to the next educational stage (middle school) (Hathroubi, 2017, p. 22).

It provides children with fundamental cognitive and experiential tools preparing them for life and their role as productive citizens (Hathroubi, 2017, p. 22). This stage is the child’s first formal learning environment—an extension of the home—where their personality begins to form, encompassing middle and late childhood.

Theoretical Framework of the Study:

1. Types of Learning Difficulties:

Several classifications exist for learning difficulties. The most common one, proposed by Kirk and Kalvant (et al., 2013, pp. 32-33), divides them into two main groups:

1.1 Developmental Learning Disabilities:

These are related to brain function and cognitive processes. They originate from functional disorders in the central nervous system and include primary developmental difficulties (attention, perception, memory) and secondary ones (thinking, speech, understanding).

1.2 Academic Learning Disabilities:

These appear in school children and relate to core subjects—reading, writing, arithmetic, and spelling.

From this classification, we see that some difficulties concern basic skills and others academic ones. Therefore, timely diagnosis and intervention are essential to provide learners with adequate support through appropriate strategies and educational tools.

Fathi Al-Zayyat classifies learning difficulties into five patterns:

1. Difficulties related to attention, comprehension, and memory.
2. Difficulties in reading, writing, and spelling.
3. Difficulties in achievement and motivation.
4. General type of learning difficulties.
5. Difficulties related to emotional problems.

Mohamed Abdel Rahim also provides a classification including twelve types such as visual, auditory, tactile, taste, smell, motor, integration, and written expression difficulties (et al., 2013, p. 33).

2. Methods of Diagnosing and Treating Learning Difficulties:

Diagnosis:

(Et al., 2013, pp. 32-35)

1. Identifying the learner with difficulty through a gap between actual and expected academic performance while ensuring no health or family problems affect learning.
2. Conducting educational assessments:
 - *Internal assessment:* identifies developmental difficulties in processes such as attention, perception, and memory.
 - *External assessment:* identifies external factors like textbooks, teaching methods, and classroom environment.
3. Designing remedial educational programs to address developmental and academic difficulties.

Treatment Methods:

(Et al., 2013, p. 66)

1. *Psychological process training strategy:* improves cognitive-perceptual abilities.

2. *Task analysis strategy*: divides skills into smaller trainable components.
3. *Behavior modification approach*: improves observable behaviors using reinforcement.
4. *Cognitive-behavioral modification*: enhances self-regulation and motivation through self-learning and self-monitoring.

4. Addressing Learning Difficulties:

(Al-Asasi, 2004, pp. 62–64)

Remediation can occur through adapted education and remedial sessions, employing three teaching methods: individual, competitive, and cooperative learning.

- *Individual learning*: adapts to each learner's pace and diagnostic outcomes.
- *Competitive learning*: introduces speed and challenge in group activities.
- *Cooperative learning*: promotes teamwork, shared tasks, and social belonging through pair work, joint projects, and network collaboration.

The teacher's role is to select suitable methods, guide learners, and observe behavior to ensure effective support.

5. The Role of Educational Support for Learners with Learning Difficulties:

(Al-Asasi, 2004, p. 20)

There are two types:

- *First type*: immediate and situational intervention by the teacher when a small group of learners falls behind, involving diagnostic assessment and remedial lessons to help them catch up.

Type One:

This type involves the teacher taking responsibility for learning difficulties discovered through observation and continuous assessment, as it is noticed that a small number of students are unable to follow lessons.

In this case, the teacher must provide immediate and situational intervention by organizing a remedial session or sessions, which would allow the student or students to catch up with the level of their classmates.

This type of support requires the teacher to have the ability, at any moment during the lessons, to assess students' achievements, diagnose the unacquired concept(s), and organize remedial work targeting them according to the following plan:

Remedial work is considered part of the educational process; therefore, it should take into account the individual abilities of the student and the knowledge that they need to acquire but have not yet mastered. In this situation, the teacher should rely on diagnosing the unacquired concepts through assessment that informs them of the nature and cause of the difficulties. The information collected by the teacher forms the basis for pedagogical mechanisms applied in remedial sessions. These mechanisms should also rely on differentiated pedagogy (Al-Asasi, 2004, p. 20).

The teacher's role in this framework can be summarized in three consecutive steps: starting with diagnosis, then determining remedial program procedures, and finally assessing the targeted students in this remedial program to verify its effectiveness. Each teacher can determine the appropriate remedial program based on the available classroom data; there is no single remedial program that can serve as a magic solution for all learning difficulties. However, there are general principles that the teacher can use to guide their remedial planning. These principles include (Al-Amayra, 2007, pp. 56–58):

- The teacher should diagnose students' learning difficulties objectively based on scientific data and evidence explaining the manifestations of learning difficulties.
- The teacher should have a thorough understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of all students with learning difficulties and identify the nature of the difficulty for each student to develop an appropriate individual remedial plan.
- The teacher should realize that no single remedial program suits all students with learning difficulties, and should always seek new and suitable strategies in this regard.
- The teacher should base the remedial program on individualized instruction, the principle of segmenting and linking educational tasks, giving students enough time to complete tasks within their capacities, while avoiding frustration that could lead to failure for the student and the program. The teacher should also consider principles of meaningful learning based on cumulative knowledge.
- If a remedial program is conducted by a special education teacher in the resource room, the general classroom teacher's role is to cooperate with the special education teacher to ensure the success of the program.
- The teacher should use sensory, visual, auditory, and tactile stimuli during the program within the students' cognitive capacities, along with suitable computer-assisted programs. The teacher should also conduct reviews and assessments of the remedial program to ensure its objectives are met.

4. Causes of Learning Difficulties:

The causes of learning difficulties vary according to the factors leading to their emergence in educational settings. These factors are as follows:

4.1 Medical Factors:

Psychologists and specialists hypothesize that there are visual, auditory, tactile, and motor pathways connected to centers in the brain that receive information through these sensory channels, relate to each other, and generate scientific meaning based on accumulated experiences. This information is then used in thinking, movement, and emotion. Any dysfunction in a brain center negatively affects the associated sensory function. Therefore, any disorder in cognitive, linguistic, academic, or motor skills can lead to learning difficulties (Others, 2013, p. 25).

4.2 Psychological and Mental Factors:

Psychological and mental factors are fundamental in influencing the learning process during educational progression. They are evident in disturbances in psychological and mental functions, which include (Al-Izza, 2002, pp. 50-51):

- Sensory perception, memory, and recall.
- Concept formation, understanding directions, difficulty interpreting concepts, and slow comprehension.
- Organizing thoughts and writing coherent sentences.
- Weakness in organization, design, and expression.
- Low verbal-motor skills.
- Weak short-term memory and difficulty completing thoughts.
- Inability to adapt.

4.3 Environmental Factors:

Environmental factors contribute to learning difficulties. Among these are lack of educational experiences, poor nutrition or medical condition, lack of training, or forcing a child to write with a specific hand. Others focus on lack of environmental stimuli and deprivation from suitable environmental experiences. Factors that may have an impact include spacing between births, the number of children in the family, family income, and the mother's age at childbirth (Kawafsha, 2005, pp. 110–111).

4.4 Educational Factors:

These include (Al-Izza, 2002, pp. 50–51):

- Educational problems, individual differences within a single curriculum.
- Differences in teaching methods, classroom unpreparedness for students' educational needs.
- Teachers' lack of training skills, and unrealistic expectations.
- Socialization practices, including overindulgence, neglect, punishment, favoritism among siblings, etc.

Practical Framework of the Study:

The research topic was examined through previous studies and theoretical references related to the research subject. The study then applied practical procedures, clarifying the main steps followed in the field study, including study methodology, tools, location, duration, sample, procedures used, and providing solutions based on the study.

Practical Framework of the Study:

- **Problem Definition:**

At the beginning of the millennium, Algeria's Ministry of Higher Education implemented several changes affecting both the teacher and learner, as well as educational policy, represented by the competency-based approach. These new measures were termed educational reforms, with significant attention to learning difficulties as a fundamental means in educational content.

This research paper, presented at the National Forum, aims to highlight challenges in the Algerian school system and analyze the phenomenon of learning difficulties in primary education. This is the focus of our study.

- **Study Problem:**

The paper addresses the following questions:

1. What is the reality of students with learning difficulties in educational practices?
2. To what extent do learning difficulties affect primary education?
3. What are the implications of learning difficulties on the learner's linguistic achievement?

- **Study Objectives:**

The study aims to:

- Closely and accurately explore aspects of the study subject through data collection in the field.
- Design and validate study tools by utilizing the information collected from sources and references.

- Study the characteristics of the tool, ensuring reliability and validity for use in the field study.
- Test the study tool on a sample to assess its suitability.
- **Study Methodology:**

Any research requires a specific methodology. Since the research topic is "Learning Difficulties in Primary Education between Reality and Aspiration - A Field Study for Students in El Oued Province," we adopted a descriptive-analytical methodology suitable for the research.

- **Field Research Tool:**

To conduct the current study and collect data, we designed a questionnaire to measure the reality of learning difficulties in primary educational practices.

- **Research Sample:**

The chosen sample consisted of students from primary schools in the Gmar district of El Oued Province, totaling 83 students. We focused on this stage because it is crucial in the learner's life, bridging to other educational stages and forming values of freedom, initiative, social communication, self-reliance, productivity, and knowledge mastery.

- **Study Time and Place:**

- a. **Time:** From 08/03/2025 to 17/03/2025, the period for distributing and collecting study tools.
- b. **Place:** Conducted in four primary schools in the city of El Oued - Gmar:

Primary School	District
Al-Khansa	1
Al-Najah	2
Al-Akhwain Bin Nasser	3
Bakouch Ammar	4

- **Statistical Analysis Tools:**

For analyzing the questionnaire, percentages were used according to the formula:

$$\frac{\text{Number of repetitions} \times 100}{\text{Sample size}} = \frac{\text{Number of repetitions}}{\text{Number of repetitions} \times 100} \times 100$$

- **Study Tool:**

To conduct the study and collect data, an observation, follow-up, and assessment card was designed to measure learners with learning difficulties through two steps:

1. Reviewing previous studies on the nature, causes, and types of learning difficulties, considering the teacher, learner, school environment, and social context, along with books and academic journals.
2. Inquiring about how the teacher addresses students with learning difficulties and the strategies used in the educational process.

- **Sample Specifications:**

○ **By Gender:**

Gender	Female	Male	Educational Stage	Total
Number	61	22	First Stage	44
Percentage	74%	26%	Second Stage	39

The table shows more females (74%) than males (26%). First-stage students slightly outnumber second-stage students.

• **By Academic Achievement:**

Activities Acquired	Activities Not Acquired	Total
35	65	100
14%	26%	60%

• **Study Analysis and Results:**

Primary students do not face major difficulties using Modern Standard Arabic but sometimes resort to code-switching, affecting their oral performance. The questionnaire shows that learning difficulties in reading, writing, and arithmetic significantly affect students' linguistic performance, especially when expressing ideas, feelings, or opinions. Increased interest in learning new languages and reduced reading habits also affect Arabic proficiency.

To address this, a remedial program based on assessment and measurement cards was implemented. Each student with a specific difficulty receives an individual plan according to the type of difficulty. Diagnostic assessments are conducted for each skill to identify weaknesses.

Conclusion:

The study's theoretical and field results clearly indicate that the teacher is central in identifying students during the educational process to provide pedagogical support for students with learning difficulties. This motivates learners, enhances self-confidence, and facilitates integration with peers, fostering educational instincts. Recommendations include:

- Focus on training teachers in early diagnosis and pedagogical support for learning difficulties.
- Assist learners with tools to understand how to learn effectively.
- Engage various educational stakeholders (teachers, principals, inspectors, psychologists, counselors, doctors, parents) in finding solutions.
- Ensure primary schools have psychologists and educational guidance counselors to support and assess students with learning difficulties.
- Adapt curricula to meet the needs of students with learning difficulties and prepare specialized curricula alongside mainstream ones.

Methodology

Research Design:

This study adopts a descriptive-analytical field research design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of learning difficulties in the primary stage.

Population and Sampling:

The study population consists of primary school learners in El Oued Province. A purposive sample of students identified by teachers as showing signs of learning difficulties was selected.

Data Collection Tools:

1. Teacher Questionnaire
2. Student Diagnostic Checklist
3. Semi-structured Interviews
4. Classroom Observation Protocol

Data Analysis:

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative responses were analyzed using thematic analysis.

Ethical Considerations

This research adhered to international ethical standards in educational research:

- Informed consent was obtained from participants.
- Confidentiality of all personal information was maintained.
- Participation was voluntary.
- Data were used solely for scientific purposes.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest concerning the publication of this study.

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