

Impact of Behavioral Problems to Special Needs Pupils

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Abstract: *The object of this study is to investigate the impact of behavioural problems on the special needs of pupils and to come up with some teaching strategies well-suited to these needs. The judgements that teachers make about the special needs of pupils are influenced by their distinctive behavior and movements, the way their attention is distracted and their inability to work in groups. The successful integration of children with learning difficulties depends less on the gravity of the learning problems and is more influenced by the behaviour of the child. If the child follows the rules of his school, he/she does not trouble the teachers and fellow-students, is keen to participate and exhibits a high level of self-management and concentration while performing his tasks. This study will focus on the most common problems found in schools: aggressive behaviour, a low level of concentration, emotional problems, etc. Such behaviour is called primary not only because of its frequency, but also because of its consequences on the learning of the student himself and that of his fellow-student. The methods and strategies that modify behaviour like: the participation of students, the concentration of attention, the management of difficult situations, the cultivation of a good opinion of oneself influence the achievements of the students and the way they use their time at school.*

Key words: *special needs, behavioural problems, attention concentration, self-assessment.*

1. Introduction

The learning problem with all its dilemmas remains a crucial psycho-pedagogical, social and methodological issue with a high theoretical and practical value for the present and the future of the rising generations and of Albanian society in general.

Learning is one of the basic didactic issues; as such it has received the due attention of social and pedagogical thought which in different historical periods has given various answers to its dilemmas in accordance with the respective socio-economic conditions.

The rapidly developing modern society in general and the sphere of education in particular are confronted more than ever by challenges and novelties. The biggest challenge of our schools is to educate open-minded students possessing a broad range of knowledge and a critical mind; citizens of a true European and democratic society, tolerant and altruistic.

The didactic issues of learning in primary education occupy a very important place in the solution of the many interconnected dilemmas which are faced by our education. In fact, the degree to which these issues are successfully resolved determines the success of the education process in higher levels. The achievement made in this field should not make us overlook some other problems like: inability to learn, difficulty of acquisition, secret drop-out, uncritical rote-learning, etc.

Learning how to read and write occupies a considerable place in primary education. An important object of this study is to investigate the causes and factors that impede the learning process and account for low results. A key factor is the behavioural problems that have an impact on the special needs of learning. The

integration of pupils who find it difficult to learn depends very little on the gravity of the problem and a lot on the kid's behaviour. If the child follows the school rules, does not cause trouble during classes, then he concentrates on his tasks and shows self-management. Aggressive behaviour and a low level of concentration are the most common problems with which teachers are faced - problems that require solution.

Another aim of as much importance is the determination of methods, strategies and techniques for the compilation of individualized curricula helpful to this category of children.

These are some of the reasons that led us to carry out such a survey, which analyzes and examines the teaching phenomenon, the premises in which it takes place, the factors that affect it and approaches & methods that must be used to provide a fruitful process and guarantee the well-functioning of school institution in the long run.

Gardner's quotation extracted from his book "The Uneducated Mind" "... we nowadays assess more deeply in comparison with the previous generations how strikingly our growth is deterred by epigenetic factors as well as by institutional actions. However, awareness of such restrictions must not disappoint us. On the contrary, this raising of conscience of our inner nature may serve as a safe guide towards the designation and implementation of a more effective social structure with regard to education." reinforces the significance of this decision-making process.

1. The aim of the study

To analyze the nature of learning from the point of view of various psychological theories intending to explain the individual factors that define the "history" of learning.

To explain the role of social factors which influence upon learning so as to modestly and concretely contribute to their improvement.

To make evident the present learning problems, the impact of behavioral problems, to analyze their causes, to assess the main strategies of resolving them.

To determine school responsibilities in teaching children about the learning process.

To draw measurable conclusions important to the advancement of the Albanian educational program.

To set higher expectations in the realm of education and teaching.

The methodology of work

For the selection and definition of the studied topic, the following issues have been taken into consideration:

- a. Learning is an acute socio-psycho-pedagogical phenomenon in the current cultural context in Albania. The availability of rich information sources in this realm. In additto theoretical and specialized resources in psychology, pedagogy and didactics, a lot of other documents and official statistics can be put into use.
- b. Data collection through questionnaires for parents, students and teachers.

In order to achieve the abovementioned aims, a study has been carried out in the "Demokracia" primary school of Korca. Having a unique character, this school consists of 17 elementary classes and 337 pupils; moreover, it is located in the suburbs, and, thus, characterized by significant socio-economical and cultural diversity, as the following table.

1.	The number of pupils with families that live on social assistance	47	14
2.	The number of pupils whose father is unemployed	63	19
3.	The number of pupils whose mother is unemployed	154	46
4.	The number of pupils with one parent in emigration	28	8.4
5.	The number of pupils with both parents in emigration	5	1.5
6.	The number of pupils from a Roma/Gypsy family	97/4	28/1.2
7.	The number of pupils with one parent alive	4	1.2
8.	The number of orphan pupils	-	-
9.	The number of pupils with divorced parents	24	7.2

10.	The number of pupils whose mother/father has a university degree	32	9.6
11.	The number of pupils whose parents have a university degree	22	6.7
12.	The number of pupils whose mother/father has a high school certificate	80	24
13.	The number of pupils whose parents have a high school certificate	72	21.6
14.	The number of pupils whose mother/father has finished secondary education	60	18
15.	The number of pupils whose parents have finished secondary education	72	22
16.	The number of pupils with parents with physical disabilities	4	1.2
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Table 1: Information about the family situation of pupils at “Demokracia” school

The study was carried out among 150 subjects in this school, including 17 teachers, 60 pupils with learning difficulties, their parents and the social workers. In order to collect the above data, questionnaires were delivered and the selected subjects were asked to complete them individually.

2. Identification of the learning difficulties and issues of the special needs for the primary school pupils

Psychological theories of the cognitive, social and moral development try to explain a number of proper age characteristics which influence the learning processes of the young pupils. These general traits of age development constitute the ground principles over which the curricula, the teaching programs and the textbooks are compiled. They do also define the objectives and the teaching methodologies that enhance successful learning.

Furthermore, it is not possible to deny the relevance of the fact that learning is an individual process that is defined by the individual qualities, needs, aptitudes, talents, wishes, self-assessment, self-motivation, character and personality.

Because of these individual features, the pupils reflect behavior problems like the lack of attention, inability to work in groups, lack of concentration, inappropriate planning attitudes, difficulties in understanding the learning tasks; as well as emotional problems, like fear from failing, low self-assessment, anxiety, need for support and encouragement, communication problems, etc.

Most of the teachers consider the term “special needs” a specifying term for retarded pupils with disabilities. Behavior difficulties have been excluded from the special needs. However, there exists a mutual influencing intercourse between the learning special needs and the behavior ones.

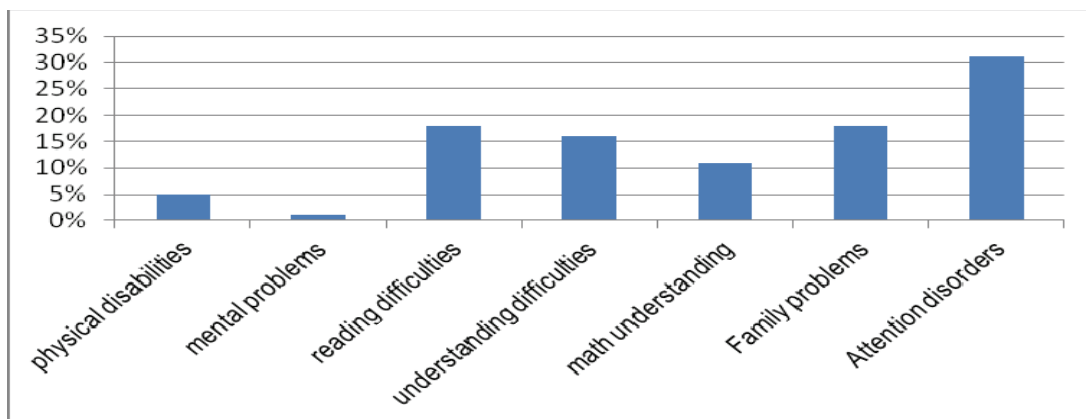
The aggressive behavior and the lack of concentration head the list of common problems among pupils at school. They require immediate solutions not just because of their frequent occurrence, but because of their negative influence on the learning process of the pupil who manifests them and that of his classmates.

Pupils who behave aggressively tend not to collaborate, they reflect signs of anxiety and denial; they are hyperactive and inattentive; tend to contradict the teachers and have an hostile attitude toward the others.

The successful learning depends on the time pupils need to complete a task without losing their concentration. For pupils with learning difficulties the intercourse between concentration and progress is critical. As the survey among the school teachers revealed, the lack of concentration headed the lists of the drawbacks for the learning needs with more than 31%.

Graphic 1: Reasons that brought about special learning needs according to the teachers' point of view.

- 5% - physical disabilities
- 1% - mental problems
- 18% - reading difficulties
- 16% - understanding difficulties
- 11% - mathematical understanding
- 18% - Family problems
- 31% - Attention disorders



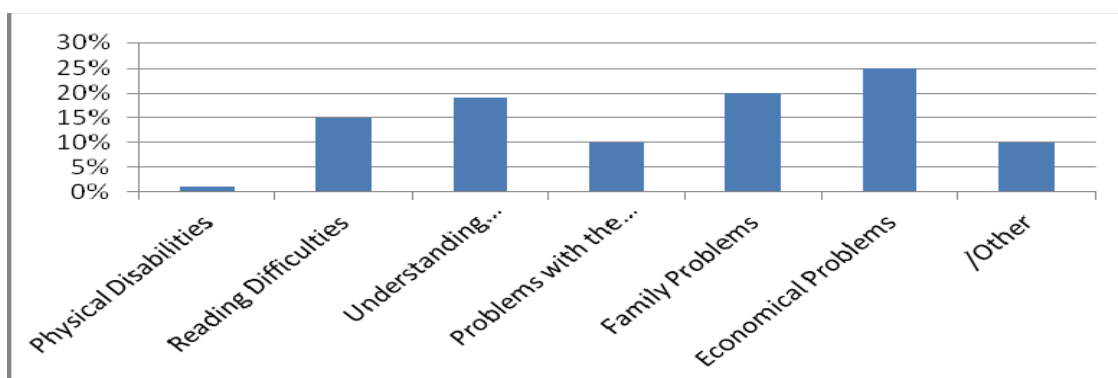
Source: Surveys carried out with the teachers of “Demokracia” school

These pupils spend less time learning than their classmates. The work with them should be organized on appropriate lesson plans designed to fit their individual needs and their learning difficulties.

In this respect, teachers should primarily recognize the source of the lack of concentration, by trying to understand the inner problems like understanding or memorizing problems, speaking, listening or reading difficulties, sight problems, cognitive or communication drawbacks, etc.

As revealed by the graphics 1 and 2 16% of the teachers and 19% of the parents think that the inability their pupils of children have in understanding concepts is the main source of the learning difficulties in reading (18%) and maths (11%) (graphic 1)

Graphic 2. Reasons that brought about special learning needs according to the parents' point of view.



Source: The questionnaire was undertaken with the children of “Demokracia” school

The second step is closely connected to other factors identified within the family, school and peer group which share the same learning difficulties.

The family takes a wide position in the scientific research concerning school held in the developed countries. This scientific research has shown in most of the cases that there is a little influence pressed by the school onto the child who has gained an independency as a result of his origin and social context. Consequently, the inequalities result to the children from their families, neighbors and the environment and they are conveyed for a long time becoming, therefore, inequalities carried on and confronted when they are grown up after finishing the school.

The study of the family factor held by various sociologists and educational specialists has brought to light a considerable number of other factors among which we can mention:

- the economical level
- the number of the children within a family
- or the relationships between parents (which we would consider as the most important one)

The collected data from school statistics (Tab. 1) display the fact that the above mentioned ingredients result into the most important potential reasons for the learning difficulties and precisely for the incapacity to understand and follow attentively the learning process.

Therefore, 217 pupils (65%) are children with one unemployed parent, 30 children (9%) have one or both parents in emigration.

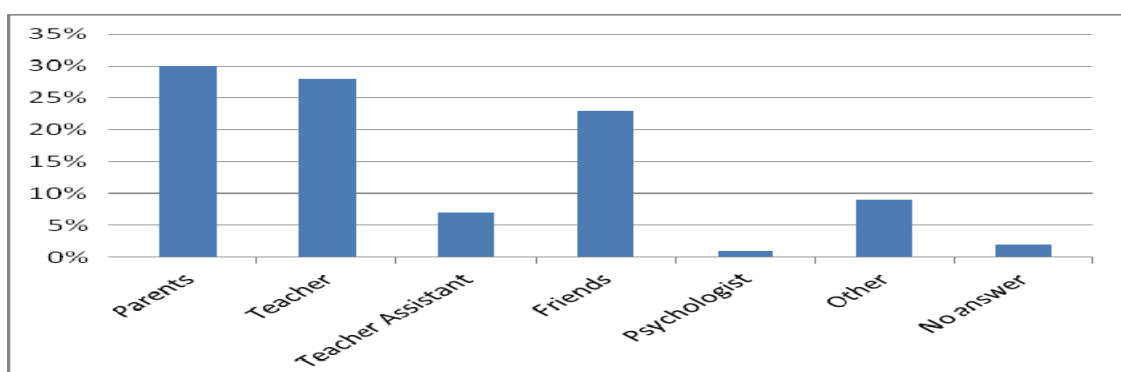
Family Socio-cultural Level

The bulk of knowledge and cultural skills inherited by the family are two issues that influence the school success. Let us underline here only the fact that cultural parental heritage are displayed ever since a young age. Bernstein, therefore, in England has conducted various studies which brought him to the conclusion that,

“... from the moment the language has shown itself to the child, its structure is clearly defined by the family environment...” (B. Bernstein, *Social Class and Linguistic Development*, Hasley, 1961, pg. 196, 293)

Other similar studies illustrate that children brought up outside their families manifest a deficiency in the linguistic level (lexical and syntactical) as well as in the usage of abstractions. The arrangement of the linguistic skills depends on the class stratum and social, racial and cultural origin. As it is shown by the data collected in Tab. 1, 101 children (29.2%) are roms and gypsies whose parents display a low or no educational or employment background. 24 children (7,2%) have their parents divorced. Therefore, the linguistic culture of the family is rather low and it is not appropriate to the school scientific culture. In this respect, these children show difficulty in understanding the school teaching material.

Graf. 3 The children need the help of



The children interviewed emphasize the fact that they need the adults (their parents and teachers) and other mates to improve their results at school. Most of these children who do not easily understand their assignments and have problems in speaking and writing come from parents with a low level education. They work long hours and do not spend too much time with their children. About 30% of these children require the attention and help of their parents. 28% also need the help and special care of the teachers. The later, feel very tired, unmotivated and do not have enough time to dedicate to their pupils because of the features of this school and the special needs of the pupils.

The social-cultural differences of these children impact on their communication and interaction, which is not good enough. These reasons explain the need they have for each-other (23% of them state this). This fact is also confirmed by the parents and teachers interviewed.

The children who have problems making friends or having difficulty in behavior and learning have a very low positive opinion of themselves. This is defined as a distinction between the way how these children want to be and the way how s/he recognizes himself. If this gap is great, the child does not feel well for himself, s/he is afraid of failure.

The duty of the school is to change these perceptions that the pupils have for themselves by motivating them while teaching. At the same time they have to observe them positively and encourage them to participate in different special activities where they can feel more capable. In this way, the teachers can manage their pupils' difficulties and skills.

As we have been emphasizing through all our case study, to be different does not mean you are not normal. Accepting these individual differences does not mean accepting that the teachers cannot do anything to change the stressful behavior. On the contrary, it means you have to work hard to modify them. It would be very unfair to consider these children as incapable of learning only because they need different ways of teaching.

For this reason, in a very modest way we recommend:

Recommendation

- Each teacher should know well the personalities of the pupils to whom he talks, explains things and communicates.
- Each teacher should be well informed about other familiar, social and environmental factors.
- Each teacher should take into consideration the features of his pupils' development.

Teachers and parents

- They should collaborate with the school psychologist or other specialized centers which test whether the child has problems with understanding or/and learning, lack of attention and hyperactivity.
- They should also recognize that each child even those who have problems with learning have the right to follow a qualitative education. They need special attention and well-organized specialized work

Teachers

- Should insist on involving all their pupils in teaching and trying to make them participate and not hide.
- Should motivate their pupils, find different of working with them to initiate their desire to get involved actively during the lessons.

- Should compile in collaboration with parents some plan of working with pupils having problems in understanding or/and learning.
- Should encourage the interest, initiative and motivation in different academic activities. They should also have the same level of performance based on their intellectual abilities.

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