



Specific Learning Difficulties in Younger School-Aged Children

Professional article

Sasa Stepanovic and Vladimir Ilic

College of Human Development, Belgrade, Serbia

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Abstract

Learning difficulties represent a significant problem for children that needs to be identified and diagnosed in a timely manner. This paper describes the three most common learning difficulties encountered in younger school-aged children, namely: dyslexia, dysgraphia, and dyscalculia. In addition to a detailed analysis of the aforementioned difficulties, this paper will also discuss the relationships between children with specific learning difficulties and their peers and teachers. All of the above constitutes the theoretical part of this master's thesis. The methodological part of the research will analyze and describe relevant scientific studies on the topic of specific learning difficulties in younger school-aged children. In this master's thesis, we will attempt to determine the importance of timely diagnosis and treatment of children who have problems with reading, writing, calculation, and speech, in order to address these issues as quickly and efficiently as possible from a professional standpoint, thus contributing to the children's success in mastering school material. Additionally, the importance of examining how specific learning difficulties (SLDs) affect the child's emotions, behavior, and environment will be explored. Methods used include descriptive, analytical, comparative, and theoretical-methodological approaches. The general hypothesis that children with specific learning difficulties require multidisciplinary support due to psychological, behavioral, and emotional challenges, with the key role of teachers and parents, has been fully confirmed.

Keywords: *Difficulties, Learning, Treatment, Speech Therapist, School*

Specific learning difficulties have drawn considerable attention from experts and researchers in recent decades. One of the key issues that captures the attention of researchers

is the early detection of disorders, as early diagnosis enables timely intervention, leading to the most positive outcomes (Obradovic et al., 2011). This issue, which many teachers

and educators in schools face, is not discussed enough. There is an insufficient number of specialized personnel in the school system to focus exclusively on detecting and diagnosing this increasingly prevalent problem among children. To tailor the pace and approach of work to the individual abilities of students, which is critical for selecting and applying appropriate, alternative, and/or compensatory learning strategies aimed at achieving optimal development for each student in line with their individual capabilities, it is essential that subject teachers recognize these difficulties in a timely manner. It is crucial not to attribute poor performance to laziness or lack of effort but to explore the potential presence of a disorder and respond promptly. Therefore, proper teacher education in recognizing specific learning difficulties in children is essential (Stepanovic, 2023).

In most of the educational systems so far, and in the current school system, reading and writing serve as the foundation for acquiring overall knowledge. It is well known that children with specific learning difficulties do not have the same opportunities to acquire knowledge as other children, resulting in learning difficulties and poorer academic performance. Children with developmental challenges are often rejected in classrooms and groups they attend, and they do not establish interaction or communication with their peers. This motivated my desire to investigate the success of prevention, identification, and treatment of specific learning difficulties. Knowledge about the "existence of the problem," deviations from typical development in areas of communication, language, speech, reading, and writing, and subsequently learning difficulties, the phenomenon of the specificity of these difficulties and needs in children, ways to seek help, and methods of mitigating the consequences of specific learning difficulties bring us closer to fulfilling the rights of children diagnosed with specific learning difficulties. This understanding leads to recognizing their uniqueness and addressing their specific interests, needs, and rights, particularly their right to participation (Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989).

Theoretical approach

The most commonly used definition relied upon by researchers and practitioners in many countries is the definition from the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-10). According to this theoretical definition, specific learning difficulties encompass disorders that manifest as specific and significant impairments in acquiring school skills (Lazarevic, 2019). The new manual from the American Psychiatric Association (DSM-5) offers a broadly accepted definition that is increasingly applied in research and is recognized by associations advocating for the rights of individuals with specific learning difficulties.

The term DSM-5 uses is "specific learning disorder," which is diagnostically defined as: "Difficulties in learning and using academic skills, indicated by the presence of at least one of the following symptoms that have persisted for at least 6 months, despite interventions aimed at addressing these difficulties." The criteria (in brief) are: inaccurate or slow and effortful reading, difficulty understanding the meaning of what is read, difficulty with spelling, difficulty with written expression, difficulty mastering number sense, number facts, or calculation, and difficulty with mathematical reasoning. Academic skills are significantly and measurably below what is expected for the person's chronological age and interfere with academic, work, and daily life. They need to be assessed individually. Below-average achievement for age—school grades and teacher evaluations indicate poor performance. Many children avoid activities that involve reading, writing, or math. Difficulties begin in school years, but for some individuals, problems may only become apparent when demands increase, leading to later discovery of the difficulties (Stepanovic, 2018).

These difficulties cannot be better explained by intellectual disabilities, vision or hearing problems, other mental or neurological disorders, psychosocial adversity, inadequate instruction in the academic language, or inappropriate teaching (Lencek, 2017).

Prevalence and diagnosis

The number of children with learning and behavioral difficulties is about 30% of the total population. What is common to all learning difficulties is that the difficulties must be clearly expressed. These difficulties are present in less than 3% of the school-age population and cannot be linked to mental retardation, neurological diseases, or educational neglect. The causes of specific learning difficulties are not precisely defined, but it is believed they stem from abnormalities in cognitive processes, largely resulting from some form of biological dysfunction (Golubovic, 2004).

The detection and early diagnosis of specific learning difficulties at the beginning of schooling are crucial, as this is the age when a diagnosis can be made with high certainty. In the diagnostic procedure of specific learning difficulties, four diagnostic models are most commonly used (Proctor & Prevatt, 2003; Sparks & Lovett, 2009; Weis & Syke, 2012): the discrepancy model, the low achievement model, the DSM-IV model, and the comprehensive cognitive model.

Types of specific learning difficulties

Each type of learning difficulty is characterized by a set of different symptoms and characteristics, which manifest differently in each individual. Since each person is a unique individual who needs an individualized approach, learning difficulties are also unique clinical entities. We will explain these in detail to understand the essence and impact of these disorders on the individual dealing with them. Each learning difficulty may occur in isolation or, as is more common, in combination with other difficulties. It is also important to note that these difficulties do not imply a complete inability to learn. Symptoms may be mild, moderate, or severe. Children with these learning difficulties have normal or above-average intelligence. With appropriate treatment, the application of specific modifications and accommodations in teaching methods and knowledge assessment, and continuous support from parents and therapists, these children can learn well, and some can excel.

Dyslexia

The International Dyslexia Association (IDA, 2002) defines dyslexia as: "Dyslexia is a specific learning disability of neurobiological origin. It is characterized by

difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition, poor spelling, and decoding abilities. These difficulties arise from deficits in the phonological component of language and are often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and classroom instruction. Secondary consequences may include problems with reading comprehension and reduced reading experience, which can impede the growth of vocabulary and background knowledge."

Dyslexia is a reading disorder despite the presence of normal intelligence, good vision and hearing, systematic instruction, adequate motivation, and other favorable educational, psychological, and social conditions. Dyslexia represents a significant mismatch between actual (existing) and expected reading levels relative to mental age (Golubovic, 2000). Dysgraphia (writing difficulties) and dyscalculia (math difficulties) often co-occur with dyslexia. Dyslexia appears in early childhood and is typically detected in early school years when children begin to acquire reading and writing skills. Children with dyslexia are of average or above-average intelligence and are often very creative, with a developed unique way of thinking. Early developmental deviations can predispose a child to reading difficulties, but unfortunately, such deviations often receive little attention, and parents usually believe they are temporary. Dyslexic children may change the order of letters or syllables in a word, substitute or omit certain letters, or add or omit words while reading. These children often describe seeing words turn in different directions, letters "dancing," being unable to follow a line, or sentences blending together into one.

The handwriting of dyslexic children is often messy and illegible. They also frequently omit or substitute letters and syllables and have difficulties expressing their thoughts in written form. Dyslexic children are often disoriented in time and space and cannot accurately determine the sequence of events. Depending on the type and level of dyslexia, a child may have some or all of these symptoms. Some of these symptoms may also appear in children without dyslexia, which can confuse parents and teachers. However, the symptoms in dyslexic children are more numerous, more pronounced, and longer-lasting. Dyslexia is also characterized by slow reading, meaning

these children take more time to read text than their peers. When reading longer texts and sentences, slow reading can lead to significant difficulties in understanding what they read.

Dysgraphia

Most definitions of developmental dysgraphia refer to a handwriting disorder and emphasize the motor components of writing: the child may have difficulties in letter formation, pressure applied on the paper, and writing speed, which manifests as slow and messy writing with uneven letters. Additionally, due to certain linguistic deficits, these children often omit letters, write incomplete words, and confuse symbols. Dysgraphic difficulties always exhibit a specific combination of symptoms that vary in severity (Lazarevic, 2012). Dysgraphia involves issues with handwriting. There are several types of dysgraphia. Some people with dysgraphia have handwriting that is often illegible, with letters that are uneven and irregular. Others write legibly but very slowly and/or in very small letters. When these individuals revert to printing letters, which often occurs, their handwriting becomes a random mix of uppercase and lowercase letters. In all cases of dysgraphia, writing requires excessive amounts of energy, effort, and time (Stepanovic, 2019).

Dysgraphia is a learning disorder in writing or the acquisition of writing ability despite normal intelligence, good vision and hearing, appropriate education, and favorable social conditions (Golubovic, 1998).

Specific difficulties (symptoms) associated with writing are most often (Pavlic-Cottiero, 2007): difficulties in connecting phonemes with graphemes, substitution of letters that are graphically or phonetically similar, prolonged "mirror" writing of letters or numbers, structural errors (insertion, addition, transposition), omission of letters, parts of words, or words, difficulties in following the direction of writing.

Non-specific difficulties associated with writing are: slowness, untidiness in work, poor legibility of handwriting, difficulties in applying spelling and grammar rules, and disrupted sense of syntax.

Dyslexia and dysgraphia often occur simultaneously in a child, but specific writing difficulties (i.e., dysgraphia) can also appear as a separate condition. Children with some

form of dysgraphia make recurring writing errors. These typical dysgraphic writing errors, their persistence, and frequency are the recognizable features of dysgraphia. The mistakes made by children when writing most commonly occur at the level of letters, syllables, or entire sentences. Most children with some form of dysgraphia also struggle with holding the pencil, as well as writing letters, words, or sentences on the line. Children with dysgraphia have untidy handwriting, problems with learning spelling, difficulties in expressing thoughts on paper, organizing ideas, and storing ideas, among many other challenges in the domain of writing (Berninger & Wolf, 2009). Writing requires the coordinated work of numerous muscles, which must be synchronized with visual-motor perception. The difficulties encountered by individuals with dysgraphia manifest in deficits in various abilities, such as concentration, organization, fine motor skills, and difficulties keeping up in school classes.

Dyscalculia

According to the International Dyscalculia Association and DSM-5, dyscalculia is a neurodevelopmental disorder of biological origin that manifests as learning difficulties and problems in acquiring academic skills significantly below age expectations. These difficulties become apparent in early school years, persist for at least six months, and are not due to intellectual disabilities, developmental disorders, or neurological and motor impairments. Mathematical difficulties belong to the category of specific learning disabilities, i.e., neurodevelopmental disorders. According to Golubovic, developmental dyscalculia usually occurs independently of proficiency in lexical and language abilities, which are unrelated to problems with mathematical operations. Developmental dyscalculia is characterized by delayed and difficult acquisition of mathematical knowledge, meaning that arithmetic abilities are significantly below the expected level compared to the child's age, general intellectual abilities, and schooling. The deficits are primarily in the areas of basic arithmetic operations such as addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division.

Long-term studies of difficulties in acquiring mathematical skills enabled Sharma (2001) to categorize the most

common errors made by students with dyscalculia into the following groups: paraphrasing substitutions, perseverations, mirror errors, slowness, placing numbers in mutually incorrect spatial positions, visual errors, procedural mistakes, poor memory, and difficulty recognizing numerical sequences. Students with dyscalculia also exhibit specific difficulties in solving mathematical problems. These challenges can be grouped into four types of arithmetic difficulties: issues in logic, difficulties in planning, perseveration of inappropriate actions, and inability to perform simple arithmetic operations. The difficulties seen in individuals with dyscalculia manifest as deficits in various abilities, particularly in arithmetic and counting. They also face challenges in time and spatial orientation, as well as memory issues.

The diagnosis of dyscalculia can be made through an individual assessment of the child's abilities, which includes: general assessment of intellectual abilities, application of tests to assess mathematical skills, and evaluation of pre-mathematical abilities. Standardized tests such as the WISC and math ability tests are used to compare the child's individual capabilities with expected abilities for their peer group.

Quantitative processing difficulties (quantitative dyscalculia) manifest as issues in counting and calculation, while qualitative processing difficulties (qualitative dyscalculia) involve problems with understanding instructions and following task sequences. Problems in mathematics become noticeable when the child begins school. Parents often report that early psychomotor development is usually normal (Golubovic, 2004). It is important to know that dyscalculia is not temporary, but a neurological condition for which the student is not responsible.

Methods

Research Subject

The subject of this research is the investigation of the causes, manifestations, and consequences of specific learning difficulties in children of younger school age.

Research Aim

Specific learning difficulties are increasingly manifesting and being recognized as a problem among children

of younger school age. Therefore, the aim of this master's thesis is to highlight the necessity of a broader understanding and engagement with this issue. The goal is to ensure that professionals, primarily speech therapists and educators, are provided with various scientific studies on the given topic, enabling them to improve their work methods in helping children with specific learning difficulties and contributing to the successful acquisition of school skills in these children. The aim of the research is also to emphasize the importance of timely diagnosis and treatment for children who have difficulties in reading, writing, math, and speech, in order to address these problems more effectively and contribute to their academic success. Additionally, the research aims to explore how specific learning difficulties (SLD) affect the child's emotions, behavior, and environment.

Research Objectives

Based on the stated aim, the following research objectives will guide our analysis of related studies on this topic:

- Investigate risk factors, specifically identifying genetic, neurological, and social factors that contribute to the development of learning difficulties in children of younger school age.
- Analyze educational methods used when working with these children.
- Investigate the impact of specific learning difficulties on the psychosocial development of the child.
- Explore and analyze support strategies for teachers and parents working with children with specific learning difficulties.

Hypotheses

General Hypothesis: Children with specific learning difficulties require multidisciplinary support due to psychological, behavioral, and emotional challenges, with teachers and parents playing a key role.

Specific Hypotheses:

- Children with specific learning difficulties, besides psychological and behavioral problems, lack self-confidence and need support from their environment.
- Teachers and educators are adequately trained to work with children with specific learning difficulties and to conduct early diagnosis of SLD.
- Collaboration with parents is a crucial factor in treating children with SLD, as well as in the successful integration of students

with specific learning difficulties into the wider community.

- A large number of younger school-age children have specific learning difficulties, and this number is increasing over time.
- Among all specific learning difficulties, dysgraphia is the most common, and boys have dysgraphia more frequently than girls.
- In developmental dyslexia, difficulties occur only in reading, while both spoken and written speech remain intact.

Research Method

To achieve the research objectives of this master's thesis, the following methods were used:

- Descriptive
- Analytical
- Comparative
- Theoretical-methodological

Interpretation of the research

When it comes to scientific research on the topic of this master's thesis, it is important to first state that the selected and reviewed studies focus on a narrow topic: the timely detection and diagnosis of specific learning difficulties in children and their proper treatment by speech therapists and educators, with the support of parents. Specific learning difficulties (SLD) represent a distinct group of developmental disorders, encompassing a wide range of possible symptoms and causes. According to research conducted by Jelisaveta Todorovic, as part of a project by the Ministry of Science and Technology, No. 1341 (2003), specific developmental disorders are classified as a diagnostic category that includes a broad spectrum of childhood disorders. These disorders are not caused by mental retardation, brain damage, educational neglect, or emotional issues. They typically emerge early in childhood and may affect speech, reading, writing, math, or general motor clumsiness.

The research conducted by Prof. Dr. Nadezda Krstic, Violica Povse-Ivkic, and Ana Radojkovic (Povse-Ivkic et al., 2008) focused on the detection of developmental dyslexia in younger school-age children. Based on their findings, we concluded the following: Developmental dyslexia is generally accompanied by underdeveloped psychomotor skills that are below the expected level for the child's age. Dyslexic children experience difficulties with motor tasks even when at rest (>80%), exhibiting a

significantly higher degree of psychomotor agitation. Dyslexic children also demonstrate uncoordinated use and gestural lateralization of upper limbs and senses (over 60%). Deficits in gnostic organization were found in 40% of the sample. Half of the children had speech issues, 15% exhibited dysgraphia, and around 40% of the sample showed one or more behavioral difficulties.

Another study by Prof. Ilic-Stosovic, Nikolic, and Milivojevic (2011), conducted in Belgrade, aimed to identify differences in the perception of causes of school failure between students with special needs and typical development. The results of this study concluded that children with special needs and SLD lack environmental support, feel inferior, and have low self-confidence, which supports our hypothesis that children with specific learning difficulties, in addition to psychological and behavioral issues, also feel insecure and lack external support.

The research by Ilic-Stosovic, Nikolic, and Janjic presented in the paper: *"Orthographic Competence and Phonological Awareness in Children with Developmental Coordination Disorder"* (2021) aimed to determine the relationship between phonological awareness and spelling achievements in children. Writing difficulties, such as underdeveloped fine motor coordination or insufficient knowledge of orthographic rules, will impact the fluency and quality of written expression not only in younger school-age children but also in older grades (Flanagan & Alfonso, 2011). The study titled *"Characteristics of Reading and Spelling in Children with Dysgraphic Handwriting"* (Golubovic et al., 2020), aimed to determine the frequency of dysgraphic handwriting, the frequency and types of spelling errors, and analyze reading speed, the number of mistakes, and comprehension of reading material in children with dysgraphic handwriting and typically developing children of younger school age. The results showed that dysgraphic handwriting was identified in 13.8% of younger school-age children, with 53.8% classified under "graphomotor dysgraphia" and 46.2% under "linguistic dysgraphia." Among the entire sample, 28% of the children had an incorrect pencil grip, 7% were left-handed, and 30% exhibited poor posture while completing language tasks. In the paper *"Characteristics of Reading*

and *Spelling in Children*" (Golubovic et al., 2020), we found interesting guidelines, suggestions, and recommendations for working with children with dysgraphia, which was one of the objectives of this master's thesis. One practical suggestion is to focus on teachers and the assessment of content quality in written form, despite the presence of dysgraphic handwriting or brief written texts.

Muhamed Rizvic, in his 2022. study, which we cited, focused on learning disabilities and attention deficits, clearly analyzing the correlation between speech therapists, teachers, and children with difficulties. He proposed clear guidelines on how working with children with developmental disorders, particularly from a sociological, emotional, and psychological perspective, can be of great benefit to school staff. Based on his research, he also provided directions and recommendations for working with these children.

Studies on dysgraphia presented us with intriguing results regarding gender, frequency, and type of dysgraphia in younger school-age children. They also led us to question why dysgraphia and SLD in general have become so common, and whether the number of affected children will continue to rise.

In addition to parents, teachers and educators play a crucial role in working with children with learning difficulties. This study referenced several pieces of research highlighting the importance of teachers and educators in this process. These studies helped us confirm whether our hypothesis about teachers was accurate. One of the first studies mentioned in this paper, conducted by Obradovic, Zlatic, and Vucetic, "*Specific Learning Difficulties - Dyslexia, Dysgraphia, and Dyscalculia in Preschool Age*" (2011), examined the extent to which educators in preschools in Serbia are trained to detect and identify specific learning difficulties early.

Another study from our region that discusses the significance of teachers in recognizing specific learning difficulties is the research titled: "*Teachers' Intuition and Knowledge in Recognizing Specific Learning Difficulties*," conducted by Prof. Dr. Svetlana Obradovic and Prof. Dr. Nadezda Krstic (2012), which was presented in this master's thesis.

We also presented research conducted by

students from the Faculty of Philosophy in Osijek, with the help of teachers and speech therapists from an elementary school in Osijek. The aim of this research was to assess specific and non-specific reading and writing difficulties in students from 3rd to 8th grade diagnosed with dyslexia and dysgraphia (speech therapist assessment) and to examine how well teachers adhere to general pedagogical principles and evaluation criteria for these children.

Discussion

Based on the research conducted by Jelisaveta Todorovic, which is cited in this paper as Study No. 1, we can see what are not the causes of learning disabilities (LD). She concludes that LDs manifest early in childhood, but the exact causes have not been thoroughly researched. This study mentions that a significant number of children with LDs also have disorders in temporal-spatial perception. Additionally, children with dyslexia and dysgraphia often exhibit disturbed spatial and rhythmic perception, or they may develop emotional and behavioral disorders. I believe this research is useful because, when we observe a problem like a rhythmic disorder in a child, we can suspect dyslexia. Similarly, if we notice a problem with spatial orientation, we can suspect dysgraphia. Based on the detailed description of this research in the paper, we can confirm our hypothesis that children with specific learning disabilities, in addition to psychological and behavioral issues, also experience insecurity and a lack of external support.

This paper also cites a study indicating that in a primary school in Nis, "Ucitelj Tasa," 50% of preschool children exhibit speech difficulties, which, in my opinion, is a significant number. Based on these results, we can confirm our hypothesis that a large number of children in schools have specific learning disabilities.

The research by Nadezda Krstic, Violica Povse-Ivkic, and Ana Radojkovic, focused on the detection of developmental dyslexia in younger school-aged children. Based on the research results, the following was concluded: Developmental dyslexia is generally accompanied by underdeveloped psychomotor skills that are below the expected level for the child's age. Dyslexic

children struggle with motor tests in rest (>80%), exhibiting a significantly elevated level of psychomotor agitation. Among children with dyslexic difficulties, there is a presence of uncoordinated use of upper limbs and sensory lateralization (in over 60%). Gnostic organization deficits are often found (in 40% of the sample). Half of the children also have speech problems, 15% have dysgraphia, and around 40% of the sample showed one or more forms of behavioral disorders. Based on all the above, as well as the obtained results, we can state that our hypothesis that children with specific learning disabilities, in addition to psychological and behavioral issues, also experience insecurity and a lack of support from their environment, is confirmed. The study conducted by Ilic-Stosovic, Nikolic, and Janjic, presented in the paper "Orthographic Competencies and Phonological Awareness in Children with Developmental Coordination Disorder," aimed to determine the connection between phonological awareness and spelling achievement in children. This study is particularly noteworthy because it describes dysgraphia and the different types of dysgraphia that exist. Dysgraphia is a unique form of specific learning disability, but little is known about its cause. It is widely recognized that both fine and gross motor skills are crucial for writing. This study compared children with developmental coordination disorders to those without such issues. The results showed significantly below-average phonological awareness and spelling skills in children with developmental coordination disorders. This demonstrates that good coordination and motor skills are critical for acquiring spelling and writing skills, and that developed speech is a prerequisite for mastering spelling. Children begin practicing fine and gross motor skills at an early age. One might wonder how activities like climbing, jumping, and crawling are related to children's spelling abilities, but this study shows that they are indeed connected. Children with well-developed coordination also have well-developed phonological awareness and spelling skills, leading to better educational outcomes.

Regarding dysgraphia, most studies on writing abilities over the past decades have focused on analyzing aspects of dysgraphic

handwriting, including qualitative analysis of graphemes, control of slant size, and pencil grip. A common characteristic of children with dysgraphic handwriting is that, even with appropriate encouragement, they do not reach the maturity level of handwriting typical for their age. Dysgraphic handwriting lacks consistency, proper spatial organization, appropriate grapheme size and shape, and adequate spacing between words, none of which are due to carelessness or lack of motivation (Golubovic, S. et al., 2020).

The study titled "Characteristics of Reading and Spelling in Children with Dysgraphic Handwriting" by Prof. Dr. Golubovic, Jecmenica, Panic, and Zikic aimed to determine the frequency of dysgraphic handwriting forms, the types of spelling errors, and to analyze reading speed, the number of errors, and reading comprehension in children with dysgraphic handwriting and typically developing children of younger school age. The results showed that dysgraphic handwriting was identified in 13.8% of younger school-aged children, with 53.8% classified under "graphomotor dysgraphia" and 46.2% under "linguistic dysgraphia." Among the total sample, 28% of younger school-aged children were found to hold the pencil incorrectly while writing, 7% were left-handed, and 30% had poor posture while sitting at a desk during language tasks. The study also found that, among the group with dysgraphic handwriting, 11% of boys and 50% of girls were left-handed, 88% of boys and 75% of girls had poor posture at their desks, and all children in the group (100%) held their pencils incorrectly. Additionally, there was a higher prevalence of dysgraphic handwriting among boys (69.1%) compared to girls (30.9%). Based on this study, we can confirm our hypothesis that dysgraphia is the most common specific learning disability, and boys are more likely to have dysgraphia than girls.

Research on dysgraphia has presented us with interesting results regarding gender and the frequency and types of dysgraphia in younger school-aged children. It also raises the question of why dysgraphia and specific learning disabilities in general have become so common, and whether the number of affected children will continue to grow. In my opinion, one possible cause is the declining fine motor and graphomotor skills

in children, which I attribute to the increasing use of phones, tablets, and joysticks, instead of engaging in free play.

One study included in this paper related to the role of teachers and parents in working with children with learning disabilities highlights that, in addition to parents, teachers, educators, and caregivers who work with children with learning disabilities are crucial. As the name suggests, these disabilities are specific, and they must be approached in a specific, unique, and individual way based on the child's needs. In this paper, we mentioned several studies showing how important teachers, educators, and caregivers are in working with these children. These studies helped us determine whether our hypothesis about teachers was correct. The first study on teachers and educators, conducted by Obradovic, Zlatić, and Vučetić ("Specific Learning Disabilities—Dyslexia, Dysgraphia, and Dyscalculia in Preschool Age," 2011), examined to what extent preschool educators in Serbia are trained to detect and identify specific learning disabilities early. The results show that educators are familiar with the conceptual definitions of learning disabilities but lack expertise in early detection and identification. Educators recognized these developmental difficulties in children exclusively as language problems, although their nature is much broader and involves altered cognitive functioning. Based on this research, we can refute our hypothesis that teachers in schools and educators are adequately trained to work with children with specific learning disabilities and to diagnose learning disabilities early.

Another study from our region, which highlights the importance and distinctiveness of teachers in identifying learning disabilities, is the study titled "Teachers' Intuition and Knowledge in Recognizing Specific Learning Disabilities," conducted by Svetlana Obradovic and Nadežda Krstić. This study examined the success of teachers in identifying discrepancies between abilities and achievements as a sign of specific developmental learning disabilities. The results showed that more than 60% of children classified as GPH (children with harmonious abilities and achievements) displayed a discrepancy between achievements in mastering target school skills and general intelligence.

The study registered a correlation between the disharmony within a child's school achievement and the accurate assessment of discrepancy by teachers, which consequently confirms our hypothesis that teachers and educators are adequately trained to work with children with specific learning disabilities and to diagnose them early.

Conclusion

Specific learning disabilities present significant challenges for every child, both in daily life and in interactions with their social environment as they grow up. Starting school represents a more complex relationship in educational work and the way it is systematically applied to children, as they begin to develop skills they hadn't used before. Therefore, it is extremely important to observe and address any problems or difficulties early on, even among children with typical psycho-physical development, although it is a fact that learning disabilities are usually noticed only when a child starts primary school. This master's thesis aimed to draw relevant conclusions based on theoretical and methodological research on the topic of specific learning disabilities in children in lower primary school grades. It succeeded in highlighting the most optimal methods and approaches to working with children who have learning disabilities.

Before employing these methods and approaches, the most important step is early diagnosis and detection of specific difficulties, so that work with the child can begin immediately. This allows speech therapy, the pedagogical approach, and the way parents live and work with their child who has difficulties to be facilitated and systematized to the greatest extent possible.

The program of inclusive education and its application to children with specific learning, developmental, and behavioral disabilities is necessary and highly effective, especially when it comes to the success of speech therapy treatments in helping the child master school skills and curriculum. This ensures that the child's further education and quality of life are normalized and enhanced, allowing the child to lead a normal life and be accepted into socialization by other children in the group and the immediate environment. The role of parents and their cooperation with the classroom teacher,

speech therapist, and other school staff is crucial in ensuring that the applied treatment has the best effect on the child and their success in overcoming learning difficulties.

Every problem, whether big or small, can be resolved to a greater or lesser extent if parental support is consistently present and if collaboration between professionals and parents is not lacking. Once a learning disability is detected in a child, it is essential to begin diagnostics and treatment as soon as possible, with individualized work both at school and at home. Due to their difficulties and challenges, the child should feel secure in every environment and be able to overcome learning problems as easily as possible. Believe in every child, just as they believe in us but not everyone must follow this path. Many have managed to overcome early developmental difficulties. Goldberg (according to Vladislavljevic) points out that famous figures like Churchill, Edison, and Einstein had dyslexic challenges.

"Every child moves toward reality along the path that is primarily biologically given to them." (S. Bojanin, 1979)

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