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## THE CONTRIBUTION OF DISTANCE LEARNING IN TEACHING STUDENTS CHARACTERIZED AS HAVING LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

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**Abstract.** *Educational data has changed rapidly over the past two years due to the spread of the Covid-19 epidemic and the replacement of traditional face-to-face teaching with distance learning. Pupils characterized as having learning difficulties were strongly influenced in the field of learning, by confinement at home, lack of concentration and difficulty in understanding the lesson.*

**Keywords:** *Covid 19, distance learning, inclusive education*

**Introduction.** In recent decades, there has been a great deal of discussion internationally about the implementation of inclusive education. Inclusive education is an educational practice, that aims to include all students in the educational process, taking into account the educational and social needs, but also any diversity (Charalampous & Papademetriou, 2019). The implementation of the contents of the inclusive theory is necessary because of the obvious phenomenon of marginalization of pupils characterized as having special

needs. This phenomenon may increase in recent years due to the spread of the coronavirus pandemic, forced confinement at home, and consequently, compulsory distance education, which limits the possibility of providing inclusive education (Charalampous, et al., 2021).

## A. Covid 19 and Distance learning in inclusive school

### a. General Findings

At this point it should be noted that the data presented at the subject of the implementation and impact of distance education on pupils with special educational needs and learning difficulties, come from the parents of pupils, teachers working in General Education, and support programs and structures (Integration Departments, parallel support), but also of from pupils, during the first assessment or their re-assessment by K.E.S.Y.

In particular it is noted that, the difficulties that accompany children with special educational needs on a social and emotional level, have intensified during the pandemic crisis, as their energy is not depleted, the lack of friends and at the social interactions does not bring relative compensation for existing deficits. Compared to the past they show, compared to before, they show more intensity to the point of agitation, they show reactive behaviors with difficulty in adapting to learning and other obligations or on the contrary students are more easily disappointed, they give up and withdraw, they feel lonely, they lose their self-confidence and their self-perception continues to decline, especially in relation to their academic abilities (Masters & et. al., 2020).

Most of these students have a desire to go back to school and return to normalcy and school society. There were also concerns and fears about whether they would be able to cope with learning with more gaps and deficits.

At the same time, there was a slight fear of contact with the group during lifelong learning, as distance learning often brings additional stress and uncertainty about the successful outcome for children due to objective difficulties (Tzifopoulos, 2020).

However, it should be noted that the amount of time spent by students on the Internet and on screens has increased and their propensity for such addictive behaviors and addictive symptoms has been "amplified" to the detriment of cultivating of social skills and communication, resulting in new learning environments. are addressed by parents and teachers with general concerns about learning disabilities - if not regression - and limited progress and improvement for students with special educational needs and learning disabilities (Rogers, 2003).

## **B. Special findings of the most significant special educational needs**

### **1. Students with special learning difficulties**

We recognize that in these cases a multi-sensory approach and a particular type of teaching is required depending on the nature and degree of the special learning difficulty. Acoustic discrimination, phonological awareness and attention, graph-phoneme translation and phoneme graph

correspondence prove to be even more painful processes for these objectively difficult students due to this type of teaching. After all, there was the possibility of alternating the sound through microphone-sound systems, so that auditory perception and consequently the processing of the stimulus were made more difficult.

In addition to graphomotor skills, these children often have difficulties with visual-motor coordination and visual-spatial perception, so constant assistance and immediate guidance is required in terms of the grip of the writing instrument, the use of graphic space, direction and the formation of graphs, intervals. In the case of dysgraphia, both intervention techniques and methods and self-correction efforts, are favored by experiential approach and processing.

Regarding the elaboration and production of the written word, it was pointed out that the specific manner did not favor the cultivation and effort to improve the students in this area who were lagging behind. Despite the assignment of relevant tasks and exercises, there was generally a lack of appropriate motivation and interest in answering the written tasks adequately exercises, especially in the exercise books.

## **2. Children with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)**

As mentioned earlier, the most important outcome is the decreased reduced attention and concentration difficulties of the students / three in general during distance learning. Students with ADHD symptoms, the procedure proved to be even more difficult for the following reasons:

- The number and variety of stimuli (visual and auditory) from different environments (home and digital).
- These stimuli were uncontrollable and had a detrimental effect on children's predictable and selective attention.
- Decreased opportunities for the teacher to restore and apply student interest and attention.
- Great scope for impulsive movements and increased motor activity constant movement about the room apparent alertness and difficulty in keeping the body in a still position during distance learning).
- Due to the lack of attention in alternating the different stimuli of the environment and easy simultaneous divided attention (Harris & Jones, 2020), these children have difficulty focusing their eye movements and directing their attention to the small space of the screen, to locate specific - somewhat static - visual stimuli and process them effectively.

## **3. Children with Diffuse Developmental Disorders**

The diversification of lifelong learning and the use of distance education have led to apparent disorganization and dysfunctionality in children with developmental disabilities, especially high-functioning children both at the interpersonal level and in learning. It is well known that their major deficits are in communication, social skill development and flexibility and adaptation to new conditions and data. Some points that reflect the difficulties arising from the change in the nature of education are the following:

- Reversal of normality and change in routine of school attendance (school, class, teacher, classmates, type of instruction, schedule).
- Difficulty adjusting, inability to understand and accept the current real situation.
- Refusal (especially initially) to participate in the process and a variety of emotional reactions (anxiety, irritability, inner tension, mild agitation).
- Desire to see and communicate with the teacher live. The parallel support teacher was a reference person for these children with whom they had begun to build trust and establish a code of communication that was necessary for their learning and global support. They now felt this was being disrupted and the more they realized this was happening, the more they felt doubly frustrated and frustrated (Reimers, 2020).
- Despite the frequent use of a personal digital space by parallel teachers to provide individualized instruction to students (usually at the end of the common program), this did not always produce the expected results. Children often reacted with fatigue, disinterest, anger and resentment. However, there were also instances where the children refused to stop the call and responded gently rather than violently.

Virtual reality, digital contact and on-screen communication act as a deterrent, further blocking already deficient communication systems and disrupting any learning process based on communication.

#### **4. Students with Mental Disabilities**

Children with mild mental retardation or low intelligence who attend general schools and participate in distance education have the following difficulties:

- Decreased perceptual ability (visual and auditory), difficulty in acquiring information through this method.
- Limited memory and difficulty in recalling and retrieving information (lack of ability to retain stimuli and information for longer periods of time).
- Teacher has difficulty in immediately determining what cognitive functions the student is lacking, what he is succeeding at, and where he is failing, in order to intervene compensatory with repetition, simplification, explanation, etc.
- Difficulties in recruiting and understanding children as digital instruction evolves - without feedback and intervention - often make monitoring difficult or even impossible. This leads to children becoming inattentive and their interest waning, so that they gradually give up and withdraw.

#### **5. Students with sensory disabilities**

I. Students with severe visual problems. With vision problems, the inability to respond to the e-learning system is a natural consequence. The teacher who provides individual support to these students is their "eye" and the means for their access to the cognitive objects that correspond to the

classroom. Online instruction, based primarily on visual perception, disables this role of the teacher. It is limited to teaching through the vocal tract (Who, 2020).

Online students, unlike lifelong learners, do not have the option of being taught via the Braille system (this is not possible). In addition, there is no way to provide and secure the appropriate equipment (e.g., Braille displays). Pupils with visual impairments can only learn by hearing, so parents need to take not only a supportive but also an active role by being constantly present during distance learning, if this is possible and they have the appropriate.

#### ii. Students with hearing impairment

For hearing impaired students, distance education on lifelong learning seems to create additional difficulties that require special treatment to partially overcome. Depending on the acoustic situation and the degree of speech perception, but also due to the specific characteristics of each student, the teacher customises the context of the lesson and the way of teaching. In particular, children who developed lip reading found it difficult to decode the teacher's oral speech from the screen (smaller and virtual space, relative image distortion, a technical problem with possible freezing of the image, etc.).

Children with impaired auditory perception (hearing loss, cochlear implant) also found it difficult to attend lessons, not only because of reduced hearing, but also because of the many and unclear acoustic stimuli (parallel speech, sound interference, poor sound, etc.). This posed an additional problem for the intelligibility of audio - cognitive instructions (CRLT, 2020).

### **6. Students with emotional and social difficulties**

Children with emotional and social difficulties usually have a positive attitude to the way modern distance learning works. Children with anxiety symptoms, severe social cowardice, school phobia, social deficits, or selective dumb behavior usually experience going to school as a stressful condition, which is one of the sources of their anxiety. On the contrary, the move and the distance have an anxiety-relieving and relieving effect.

Children with selective mutism gradually stopped being silent and participated in verbal communication (even initially with closed camera). On the contrary, the return to school unfortunately meant the return of their social stress, which also affected their learning level.

**C. Conclusions.** Summarizing the data previously collected and analyzed, it can be concluded that the Covid 19 pandemic has greatly differentiated the educational data. The above findings do not leave students with learning difficulties unaffected, as they may have difficulty concentrating and understanding distance education during distance learning, causing them to have additional concerns about their performance. Therefore, the difficulties encountered by students with learning difficulties during distance learning may lead to a sense of marginalization.

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