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The Prevalence of Reading Difficulties among Children in Scholar Age

Maria Rosita Cecilia, *PhD Student*
Pierpaolo Vittorini, *Researcher*
Vincenza Cofini, *Researcher*
Ferdinando di Orio, *Professor*

University of L'Aquila
Dep. of Life, Health and Environmental Sciences
Via S. Salvatore, Edificio Delta 6
67100 L'Aquila
mariarosita.cecilia@graduate.univaq.it
pierpaolo.vittorini@cc.univaq.it
vincenza.cofini@cc.univaq.it
ferdinando.diorio@cc.univaq.it

Abstract: The study investigates the prevalence of reading difficulties among children in scholar age and analyses the socio-demographic characteristics of learners who presented reading difficulties in central Italy. A sample of 623 students 7-11 aged, was assessed with the Italian MT standardized tests. Information on gender, age, handedness, and other socio-demographic variables were also gathered. The study showed that 11% of learners presented poor comprehension skills. The reading speed difficulties were more common than the reading correctness problems: about 7% of children vs 1% were dyslexics due to slow reading. There were no significant differences regarding gender, age. However, dominant hand and the school location seemed to affect the speed difficulties and the comprehension problems. The analyses showed that attending a school located in a rural area was statistically associated with the reading difficulties. Left-handed children were more likely to be slow decoders and/or poor comprehenders. These findings may be used in the early diagnosis of poor readers. These difficulties often have a chronic progression with substantial psychosocial limitations and psychological stress, so children with reading difficulties should be identified as early as possible.

Keywords: learning disabilities; poor decoders; poor comprehenders; dyslexia; handedness.

1. Introduction

Reading is a complex cognitive process and an important mean of language acquisition, communication, and sharing information and ideas (May, 1998). Reading transforms print to speech and print to meaning through a negotiation of meaning between the text and its reader, as an activity of problem solving (Snowling & Hume, 2008; De Beni & Pazzaglia, 1995). According to the Simple View of Reading, reading