

Reading and Writing: Learning Difficulties, Causes and Teacher's Intervention

Maria Rodrigues Henriques¹, Maria Leocádia Madeira²
¹3rd Cycle and Secondary Education Teacher, Portugal
²Universidade Fernando Pessoa, Porto, Portugal

Abstract

The aim of this study is to analyse the relationship between the learning difficulties in reading and writing, their causes and the differentiated practices needed to overcome the detected difficulties. For this purpose a qualitative and quantitative type of investigation was led where, through a semi-structured interview, 15 primary teachers were interviewed. The gathered information was analysed through the technique of content analysis and the collected data was quantified through the analysis of occurrences. According to the results it became evident that reading and writing are interconnected and when the acquisition of either one of the skills is compromised, there is an immediate and visible reflection of it in the acquisition process of the other. Furthermore it was shown that the intrinsic and/or extrinsic causes that origin these difficulties can have different factors. Another very important result that came out from this study is related to the teachers' practice. Teachers can't often give a proper answer to the students' needs mainly due to the complexity in terms of understanding the specific learning difficulties as well as their lack of knowledge regarding an effective differentiated pedagogy, since their intervention does not meet the student's needs, being this one of the biggest barriers in overcoming learning difficulties.

1. Introduction

Although the paradigm of a "School for All" has been widely discussed, in practice, what happens in schools is an increasing attempt to normalize, standardize and to determine that everyone knows the same, at the same time and under the same strategies.

In this context, students with special educational needs, particularly those with learning difficulties, are the ones who most challenge schools and teachers. In order to guarantee the learning of these students it is necessary to know their learning profile, understand their pace of work and their strengths and adapt the teaching-learning process. Difficulties in learning reading and writing make one of the major barriers to learning and to a school career of success

that will be reflected in adult life. Therefore, school as well as teachers must be attentive to students' needs, difficulties and learning profiles.

The obvious difficulties in reading, reading comprehension and writing skills of students in more advanced cycles led us to question what kind of work was being done with these students that allowed them to pass without acquiring and consolidating basic learning contents that would have enabled a continuous progress in students' academic skills.

Reading and writing acquisition is a complex competence that involves cognitive and linguistic skills and that constitutes a prerequisite for effective communication and social inclusion. With this knowledge came the need and interest to find out primary teachers' opinion on the main difficulties students had in learning reading and writing as well as what were the main causes for these difficulties and how they could help students in promoting a successful path to enable the learning process of these two skills since the beginning of schooling. In order to achieve this, it is important to consider the fact that the teaching practice should take into account the students' differences, previous acquisitions, qualities, interests, learning rhythms and difficulties.

2. Theoretical context

2.1 The Learning of Reading and Writing

In today's society, learning to read and write is an expected goal for all children to reach when they enter basic education since it is considered a fundamental learning acquisition [1]. The learning of written language (reading / writing) is one of the fundamental tasks to be solved by the children at the beginning of primary education. It must also be considered and conceived as a continuous appropriation process that begins to develop at a very early stage and not only when there is formal education [2]. This learning acquisition is one of the main achievements that children perform in the 1st cycle of basic education and understanding the processes involved in learning is important to adapt the educational praxis and to prevent learning

disabilities in this area [3]. Since any written production activity contains and integrates in itself reading, it is important not to separate both, the reading activity and the written production, in the initiation phase of written language [4].

Learning is not a passive mechanism but an active process of knowledge reconstruction, in which the learner's knowledge and representations are decisive in the way in which he will integrate and give meaning to what will be taught to him [2].

Several authors substantiate that the acquisition of these skills – reading and writing – is complex and that it involves a set of linguistic and cognitive skills that are acquired early, requiring however, explicit learning. The acquisition of these two competences/skills is not limited to decryption and encryption, but also and mainly to understanding and expression, implying any communicative intent and developing according to different dimensions, models and methods [5], [6], [7]. In the initial phase of reading learning, the reading process is complex and requires the intervention of numerous components that have to be learned and practiced, such as oral language; visual processing; perception and recognition of written words; cognition; and cultural interactions. However, in the reading process it is also important to refer to comprehension as a fundamental component of reading, since we accept that it is not enough to read: we must understand what we read.

Writing has always served to communicate thoughts, feelings, information and to accomplish it there are associated specific social and cultural practices. It also has an important role in the diffusion of knowledge and concepts and in the construction of knowledge, being specifically developed by human society for these purposes. The learning of writing is admittedly a slow and long process and the complexity of writing and the multiplicity of its uses and purposes make it imperative to be an object of instruction from the beginning of schooling.

Writing involves necessarily a learning process that has its beginning even before school age and entry into the formal learning of the academic world through contact with the surrounding environment. Children build knowledge about reading and writing before they are formally taught to read and write, and learning this two skills follows processes similar to those of learning from any other cultural competence. None the less, it is through the effective practice of writing that we learn, which means, that we learn how to write, writing.

The learning of writing goes through several levels, starting in the pre-school period, is acquired and developed, as a priority, during schooling, but its development and improvement are not left by school learning [11].

2.2 Learning Difficulties

The Learning Disabilities have been the subject of extensive research over the main causes of these difficulties and how it would be possible to lead students on a successful path in learning these two skills from the beginning of schooling. Despite many studies, there is still no definition of Learning Disabilities that meet the general consensus. However, studies in this area have put in evidence the characteristics of children with developmental and academic learning disabilities, pointing out paths for work to be done with them in order to set aside an early school failure or later academic and social consequences [8], [9], [10], [11], [12].

Nowadays students with Learning Difficulties/Disabilities are in a growing number and therefore it becomes essential to consider this problem with concern, to think about the problematics involved and to intervene in the most adequate way so that an answer to the student's needs is given and effective and successful learning is promoted.

Students with learning disabilities do not learn normally, they present failures, obstacles and constraints where others do not show, reaching levels of education that tend to be lower than their intellectual possibilities and that of those students registered in the same age [8]. The existence of an academic discrepancy, between the estimated intelligence potential and school achievement, and the fact that learning difficulties are a lifelong condition (do not disappear with age) although adequate intervention can minimise the difficulties, are some of the characteristics of these students [9]. The characteristics of children with learning disabilities are inherently very heterogeneous, with some common denominators, regardless of whether they may arise together or alone, although all these characteristics result in poor academic performance.

Children with difficulties in reading and writing are often at a disadvantage in all curricular areas, which sometimes leads to the existence of insurmountable repercussions and therefore failure at school [12]. So, it is necessary that teachers are knowledgeable about the causes of their students' difficulties in order to identify them, detect the degree of severity and develop with these students intervention strategies in the educational context.

According to authors, it can be found four levels of circumstances for the causes of students' difficulties: the student and his characteristics throughout the learning process; teaching programs (curricula); the teachers; school's social and physical environment. The socio-economic and cultural needs of the society and of the community and the family environment of the student are reflected in the level of the causes previously mentioned.

It is known that learning difficulties in reading and writing are big barriers for learning and for having a successful schooling process having also a direct impact on adult life. Therefore, it is the school and teachers' responsibility to attend to student's needs, difficulties and learning profiles.

2.3 Pedagogical Differentiation

The concept of pedagogical differentiation arises with the change of student's perception, in other words, when the student is recognized as a person, and has as purpose adapting the contents and processes to the particular characteristics of each individual, in order to obtain the greatest possible success for students, allowing each one to find the best way to learn according to their individualities.

It is a concept from studies and intervention led by sociologists of education committed to understand and seek new solutions to issues of school failure, social and cultural discrimination, school abandonment and exclusion leading to marginalization and to the exclusion of those who suffer it [13].

Pedagogical Differentiation plays an essential role in the development and understanding curriculum learning and to find solutions to school failure, discrimination, neglect and exclusion [13]. It means to define different paths and different curricular options for different situations that can, in each situation, enhance the acquisition of the required learning in curriculum management, being necessary to differentiate in several levels the school's options to reach its goals.

The great challenge in evidence currently is to stop being so concerned about teaching and to create effective conditions for students to learn [14]. Differentiating teaching does not mean providing normal tasks to the majority of students and tasks different for the rest. It is important to realize that the pedagogical differentiation practices must have in consideration the differences between students, their previous acquisitions, their qualities and interests as well as their learning rhythms and its difficulties. Using differentiation practices allows us to mitigate educational inequalities and overcome them by implementing a diverse set of means and teaching-learning processes that enable students, in their individuality, and in heterogeneous classes, to reach common goals. All this management of means, processes and products implies that different practices are incorporated into strategies to individualize the paths of each student, contributing to their success and to the ability to share meaningful learning acquisitions [15], [16], [17], [18], [19], [20].

It's important to understand that the differences in the academic results of the schools are systematically related to the characteristics of the

educational processes that can be modified by teachers' group. The use of pedagogical differentiation allows us to rethink educational inequalities and try to overcome them, obviously with the awareness that there is a set of variables external to the school that generate deep social inequalities that make the equity of educational success more difficult.

It's a gigantic task of *revolutionizing the soul of schools* (the institution) [13] and our professional culture, based on school tradition to which we have all been subjected, guided by "*teaching many as if they were one*" [18].

Starting from this context, we proposed to answer the following questions:

- What main difficulties students have in learning to read and write?
- What causes teachers point out as a justification for the difficulties of learning to read and write of their students?
- What are the practices implemented by primary teachers in the teaching-learning process of reading and writing concerning the difficulties of their students?
- How do teachers evaluate the implementation of their practices to overcome the difficulties of learning to read and write of their students?

3. Methodology and procedures

This study is mostly qualitative but also quantitative. Through a semi-structured interview with open questions, 15 primary teachers who work in schools of a School Group in the city of Caldas da Rainha were interviewed in order to know their opinion about the difficulties of their students, what kind of practices to overcome some of those difficulties were implemented and what assessment teachers made of that implementation.

To achieve the general aim, we proposed to attend the following specific objectives:

- Identifying students' main difficulties in learning reading and writing;
- Understanding what primary teachers think about the causes of their students' reading and writing learning difficulties;
- Verifying the teachers' practices in the teaching-learning process towards their students' difficulties;
- Understanding what assessment teachers do of their practices to overcome students' reading and writing learning difficulties.

After the interviews, the transcriptions were made with the highest possible reliability; then proceeding with the organization, processing and analysis.

The gathered information was analysed through the technique of content analysis and the collected data was quantified through the analysis of occurrences.

Content analysis is a technique widely used in the treatment of discursive content information for which there are three wide categories of methods: thematic analyses, formal analyses and structural analyses. The category used in the present work was the categorical analysis that fits the thematic analysis and consists in calculating and comparing the frequencies of certain characteristics previously grouped into significant categories.

3.1. Target

The study was attended by 15 teachers who teach the 1st cycle of Basic Education of the School Group D. João II, in the city of Caldas da Rainha, obtained by indication of the Department Coordinator.

For the age range, the sample of individuals participating in the interview was 36 to 55 years, verifying that the predominant age group is between 50 and 54 years old, a total of 40%. 12 females, respectively 80% and 3 male, corresponding to 20% of the total sample. All of the individuals hold bachelor degree. All are teachers of the Framework. The average teaching experience is located in 24, 2 years, with a minimum time 12 years and maximum 34 years. 7 of 15 effective are not in possession of any kind of training in Special Education. Respondents are mainly to teach simultaneous two years/grades with a total of 5 teachers in 15 constituents of the sample. The number of students present in the middle classes of participants is 22, with a maximum of 26 and minimum of 11. 7 of the fourteen classes taught by teachers interviewed have only one pupil with SEN, three classes have two students and five did not have students with special educational needs.

4. Discussion

From the content analysis emerged four themes: Learning Disabilities; Causes of Learning Disabilities; Pedagogical Differentiation Strategies; and Evaluation of Pedagogical Differentiation strategies. For all themes emerged two categories: Reading and Writing. Only the results that have obtained the highest percentage of responses will be presented.

In the first theme (see Table 1), the analysis of the results revealed that most teachers pointed out as major difficulties in learning to read the “Language” subcategory in indicators “Deciphering” and “Phonological Awareness”. Having difficulty in deciphering, there will be difficulties in the acquisition of reading, because learning to decipher consists in having the appropriation strategies, requiring therefore an explicit teaching, consistent and systematized by the person who teaches [7]. Many studies have shown there is a strong predictive relationship between phonological awareness level of

children and their success and progress in learning to read, taking a prominent role as a successful precondition in the reading and writing learning.

The subcategory “Prerequisites” had a frequency of 20%, however, the teachers did not emphasize what preconditions constituted the difficulties of their students. Several authors agree that, before starting the reading and writing learning, it should be taken into account the development of children, in particular their maturity or their ability to perform [11].

The “Reading” and “Attention / Concentration” subcategories bring only 13.4% of the answers, but it is interesting to cross information with the causes of students' difficulties in reading and verify that teachers referred as the main causes psychological factors (students' lack of attention and concentration) with the practices of pedagogical differentiation and realize that Reading Training is the indicator with the highest percentage of answers.

Table 1. Reading Difficulties

Indicators	Percentage
Deciphering	40%
Phonological Awareness	20%
Prerequisites	20%
Reading fluency	13.4%
Attention	13.4%

With regard to the difficulties of writing (see Table 2), the subcategory with more occurrences was once again the “Language”, being the indicator with more percentage of responses “Articulation”, followed by “Decrypt”. The “Fine motor skills” indicator, in “Prerequisites” subcategory added, also, a significant percentage. The “Orthographic Errors” indicator, unique in the Spelling subcategory, obtained a total of 20%, also significant.

Table 2. Writing Difficulties

Indicators	Percentage
Articulation	33.4%
Fine motor skills	33.4%
Decrypt	26.7%
Spelling errors	20%

Reading the results, we realise the idea that students' difficulties within the writing competence of the acquisition also compromises the level of fine motor skills, showing that simple motor acts may expose the student to difficulties of writing learning [11]. However, the articulation component is equally important in the acquisition of writing skills as teachers report that a bad articulation prevents good writing. Linguistic awareness is a precondition for the fluency of reading and writing proficiency, and a good level of performance in these skills is among the most important factors of school success.

Even for these two categories, many of the interviewed considered that the difficulties that students have in learning to read, are the same in writing because they are complementary processes.

It is noted that most of the teachers interviewed said, regarding the difficulties in learning reading and writing that these are the reasons for the difficulties experienced by students and not the type of difficulties that students have in learning to read and / or write, confusing the concepts of Difficulties and Causes of the difficulties.

On the theme Causes of Learning Disabilities for reading (see Table 3), the subcategory with more occurrences was “Extrinsic Causes”, where “Social-familial Factors” indicator presented 73.3% of responses. The teachers interviewed showed concern with the lack of monitoring by parents / family, the lack of reading habits and family motivation. These factors also contribute to the difficulties of students and their school failure, revealing that the family works more as a barrier to learning than as a facilitator.

Also the subcategory “Intrinsic Causes” in “Psychological Factors” indicator showed a high response rate, 66.7%. The reasons mentioned in this indicator appear, somehow allied to the reasons in the indicator “Social-familial Factors”, pointing again to the affective and loss-making family relations problems, highlighting also the lack of motivation, commitment and interest, attention and concentration, reflecting what is happening in the family with the lack of sensory stimulation, cognitive of experiences and lack of importance given to school and learning by some parents / families, as was reported by some teachers interviewed: *“The lack of cognitive stimulation of some students, socioeconomic condition, because it has a lot to do with family, lack of family monitoring and motivation to be able to stimulate their kids for learning, lack of interest ... the degree of literacy that parents may have in the household, lack of family support.”*

Also in this category, there are the indicators “Pedagogic Factors” with 53.3% of responses and “Sociocultural Factors” with 46.7%. As for “Pedagogic Factors”, no teacher put in question their methods or didactic and pedagogical options, focusing on the educational system, referring to classes with high numbers of students and the number of hours students spend every day at school, curriculum management, with the implementation of curricula or inappropriate curriculum goals to intellectual maturity of the students, as some teachers referred: *“Nowadays, learning programs and goals are so demanding and, in many cases, absurd that children are confronted daily with frustrations that they should not confront. (...) At the moment, I think there is a very marked discrepancy between the students, their age group and what is required of them”*. However, one of the teachers pointed out a

very important aspect that should be highlighted: *“(...) I think that school also plays an important role and it seems to me that sometimes there is a low investment of educators. Often educators are not awake to the problems that children present to us and, for that reason, do not give them the appropriate answers.”*

Table 3. Reading Difficulties’ Causes

Subcategories	Indicators	Percentage
Extrinsic Causes	Social-familial Factors	73.3%
	Pedagogic Factors	53.3%
	Sociocultural Factors	46.7%
Intrinsic Causes	Psychological Factors	66.7%
	Biological Factors	33.4%

On the theme Causes of Learning Disabilities, for writing (see Table 4), it was found that the subcategory with more occurrences was “Intrinsic Causes”, with 86.7% of responses in the indicator “Psychological Factors” and 53.3% in the indicator “Biological Factors”. This indicator assembled the large percentage of responses, since many teachers mentioned neurobiological problems such as dyslexia, dysgraphia or dysorthographia (neuro-developmental disorders of biological origin) as well as sensory problems or physical and behavioural disorders of neurobiological origin.

In the subcategory “Extrinsic Causes”, indicators “Pedagogical Factors” and “Social-familial Factors” met the same percentage of answers 40% and the indicator “Sociocultural Factors” 26.7%, being the presented answers similar to the reading category.

Table 4. Writing Difficulties’ Causes

Subcategories	Indicators	Percentage
Extrinsic Causes	Pedagogical Factors	40%
	Social-familial Factors	40%
	Sociocultural Factors	26.7%
Intrinsic Causes	Psychological Factors	86.7%
	Biological Factors	53.3%

It is interesting to note that the majority of teachers initially stated that the causes of reading learning difficulties were the same as those of writing, however, reading the tables it reveals percentage differences for the same subcategories and indicators in both categories in the analysis on this theme.

On the third theme, Pedagogical Differentiation Strategies, there was a wide dispersion of responses to the various subcategories and indicators – eighteen in total. The indicator “Reading training” from subcategory “Strategies based on the reading”,

obtained the highest percentage of responses, immediately followed by indicators “Teaching reading methods” from the subcategory “Strategies based in reading” and “Games” from the subcategory “Ludic activities”. “Individualised teaching” and “Personal support on learning” were two strategies referred, but with low expression – only two answers each (see Table 5).

Table 5. Strategies for reading difficulties

Indicators	Percentage
Reading training	46.7%
Teaching reading methods	26.7%
Games	26.7%
Individualised teaching	13.4%
Personal support	13.4%

It is interesting to make the crossing of the data presented in the categories “Reading” of the three subjects discussed, since the teachers interviewed pointed out as the main difficulties of the students in the acquisition of reading Deciphering and Phonological Awareness and as causes of these difficulties Psychological Factors, Pedagogic and Social-familial.

However in the educational intervention with these students, the pedagogical differentiation strategies outlined, are a repetition of usual activities with training activities / enhanced reading or games with play-didactic character, applied to classes in general, under the argument of “recovery” or “reinforcement”. These strategies do not focus on the cause of the problem and do not always work the way expected by the teachers, because it don’t respond to students’ real needs.

Yet, one of the interviewed teacher confirmed the idea that is important to intervene in other way: *“it’s not factors of differentiation of reading and writing that determine this question. It’s the other factors, all of them. The lack of more and more ... time, family investment ..., family relationship... waging on spending time with the kids and show them things.”* Even though they recognise their strategies are not suitable for the students’ difficulties, they don’t seem to be proactive in searching the adequate response for the needs students present: such as family support; emotional education workshops, parenting support.

In the category “Writing” of this theme, the subcategory and index with more response rate was Ludic Activities - Games. With 33.4% arise the indicator “Training of expressive writing”, from the subcategory “Strategies based in writing” and “Working pairs”. Another strategy point out by teachers and with some expression percentage was “Dictation exercises” (see Table 6).

Table 6. Strategies for writing difficulties

Indicators	Percentage
Ludic activities - Games	53.3%
Training of expressive writing	33.4%
Working pairs	33.4%
Dictation exercises	20%

Doing the same crossing information and analysing the data of the category “Writing” of the three themes, as it was done for the “Reading”, we verified that the interviewed teachers pointed out as mains difficulties detected in the acquisition of writing Fine motor skills, Articulation and Decoding and as causes of these difficulties Psychological Factors and Biological.

Again, with regard to pedagogical differentiation strategies implemented by these teachers to overcome their students’ difficulties, we concluded that there is an inadequacy in terms of practices implemented because it does not respond appropriately to students’ needs.

The pedagogical differentiation practices implicate the attendance of the learning needs of a particular student or of a small group of children, contrasting with the typical model of teaching all the elements of a class as if they were all the same, a model that seems to be the practice of some of the interviewees, an idea supported by the opinions and answers given in the interviews. For example: *“Writing individually and in groups, from playful motives (...) free created texts, texts with suggested themes, completing stories, creating stories from images...”* or *“I make pairs students with more difficulties with others who apparently do not have any difficulties”*.

There should be the implementation of a set of pedagogical management strategies through appropriate and challenging school tasks and a continuous adjustment of pedagogical intervention from the evaluation, and then teachers could differentiate contents, processes and products according to the students.

The analysis of the data theme “Evaluation of Pedagogical Differentiation strategies” in both categories, was made jointly, as the participants showed some difficulty in separating the answers. Most respondents (73.3%) did a descriptive assessment of their practices, showing satisfaction with the results they obtain in students’ success, the effort they put in their work, but also demonstrate some frustration because they cannot always assure that all students overcome their difficulties, as one said: *“Sometimes I confess that I feel frustrated because I have the feeling that whatever I do ... does not work with some ... (...) I feel that I have lost qualities ... or else I can’t get where I was before... by other factors, I do not know. But I notice that I have been less successful in the last few years than I had been before and I also noticed that I am*

increasingly worried and spend more time conceiving strategies, and inventing ... ways to present things, to turn things around, but ... I think the bigger the investment, the less results I see."

The pedagogical differentiation is a question of attitude of the teacher, because it is not enough to master all the techniques, nor to have learned all the methodologies, without the transformation of the attitude towards this methodology [15].

What is clear from this study is that the participating teachers demonstrate this attitude, but reveal a lack of techniques and methodologies for a real implementation of adaptive education and, therefore, some assume their inability to help all students to overcome their difficulties.

5. Conclusion

According to the results, it was showed that most teachers could spontaneously identify the difficulties of their students, demonstrating what had been reported in the literature review, on the importance of work to be done in early childhood and preschool age. However, it was noted that teachers still mistake the concept "difficulties" with their "causes", since some of them still mix concepts, so it is essential to promote amongst the teachers, the clarification of the concept that allows them to identify their students' barriers to learning accurately.

It was also seen that the causes that justify these difficulties did not constitute a problem for the teachers interviewed, which clearly reported different causes. From the reasons presented, most of them confirmed what we are experiencing in today's society and in school and, regards to this, teachers show a major concern with the lack of time that families have for children; the lack of personal and social experiences of some students; the exaggeration of curricula and curricular goals that have to be learned and acquired by students in a short term; the options of management issued by the Ministry of Education, regarding the number of pupils per class, the insufficient hours available to help students as well as the recent extension of students' daily timetable.

As for pedagogical differentiation practices implemented by teachers interviewed, we concluded that the strategies set out by the participants lack of systematisation and clarification procedures, as there was a wide dispersion of responses and those identified pedagogic differentiation strategies don't fulfil students' real needs.

We can conclude that teaching remains focused on the teacher, who, by intuition, looks for solutions to the different needs of students in a sort of spontaneous differentiation, but in a common time to perform the same tasks for all. It is then time to rethink and realize that the great challenge that is currently loaded is to stop being so concerned about

teaching and to create effective conditions for students to learn.

This displacement of the teaching approach to student learning necessarily implies the use of differentiation strategies. Participating teachers have demonstrated an attitude and willingness to do differently with students with difficulties, but revealed ignorance of techniques and methodologies for a real implementation of pedagogic differentiation, and therefore some assumed their inability to help all students in overcoming their difficulties.

Hereupon, it is essential to make clear that:

- The lack of clarification of the Learning Difficulties concept doesn't allow teachers to identify their students' barriers to learning accurately;
- The difficulties students show in learning to read are the same in writing, for they are interconnected mechanisms;
- The success in learning reading and writing depend on a good oral performance and phonological awareness training;
- It is required an explicit teaching of decoding and of reading strategies;
- The lack of parent monitoring, reading habits and family motivation contribute to students' difficulties;
- Affective and family problems are also seen as causes of learning difficulties;
- No teacher highlighted their methods or didactic and pedagogical options, making a positive assessment of their practices;
- Teachers gave a wide dispersion and too vague responses, regarding the pedagogical differentiation practices/strategies;
- Teachers have concern in applying Pedagogical Differentiation, but reveal a lack of strategies for a real implementation of adaptive education;
- The Pedagogical Differentiation strategies presented don't respond to students' real needs and don't take into consideration the causes of their difficulties;
- Teachers demonstrated an attitude and willingness to do differently, but revealed ignorance of techniques and methodologies for a real implementation of Pedagogical Differentiation;
- Some teachers experience frustration for they assume their inability to help all students in overcoming their difficulties;
- The exaggeration of curricula and curricular goals, classes with large number of students and lack of tutoring hours lead to new difficulties.

According to the results and looking upon teachers' difficulty in defining Learning Disabilities and understanding how to implement Pedagogical Differentiation practices, it is visible that, at the initial level of teacher education, it is essential to update the curricula of educational courses in universities for a better knowledge of Special

Educational Needs by including the theme of Learning Disabilities - among other issues of SEN – as well as setting out different teaching and learning strategies, such as Pedagogical Differentiation.

In terms of further education, it is important that the complementary education centres make available and promote more training in this area, where Learning Disabilities can be addressed and strengthened by describing its specifications and presenting educational intervention strategies as appropriate as possible. Inclusion requires a restructuring of the traditional school in order to allow all learners to learn, stimulate and respect their diverse capacities, interests, characteristics and needs.

We consider that it's imperative an appeal to debate, in schools, about the growing number of students with learning difficulties and about the need to have adequate answers for them in the different education cycles that allow true inclusion and equal opportunities. To think that these students are doomed to school failure and social exclusion is to go against the vision of inclusive school as a decisive way of social inclusion and demonstrate that attitudinal and mental barriers are harder to overthrow than physical ones. Currently, it is necessary that School become a context of equality and respect, with an adequate and diversified educational offer and close collaboration among the agents of the different contexts (family, educational and social), regardless of what still needs to be done.

Following our investigation, it is meaningful to propose some future research lines:

- Extending the sample in a similar study (a significant and representative sample of primary teachers at national level);
- Verifying the consensus of the answers regarding the difficulties of learning to read and write, the causes and the different practice of the teachers.

6. References

- [1] Cunha, S.M.S. (2011). *A aprendizagem da leitura e da escrita - Factores pedagógicos e cognitivos*. Lisboa: Escola Superior de Educação Almeida Garrett.
- [2] Martins, M. (1996). *Pré-história da Aprendizagem da leitura*. Lisboa: Instituto Superior Psicologia Aplicada.
- [3] Velasquez, M.G.M.C.F. (2007). *Percursos Desenvolvimentais de Leitura e Escrita – Estudo longitudinal com alunos do 1.º ciclo do ensino básico*. Braga: Universidade do Minho.
- [4] Mota, I., Niza, I. e Segura, J. (2011). *Guião de Implementação do Programa de Português do Ensino Básico: Escrita*. Lisboa: Ministério da Educação – DGIDC
- [5] Mata, L. (2008). *A descoberta da escrita: textos de apoio para educadores de infância*. Lisboa: Ministério da Educação - DGIDC.
- [6] Mialaret, G. (1997). *A Aprendizagem da Leitura*. Lisboa: Editorial Estampa.
- [7] Sim-Sim, I. (2009). *O Ensino da Leitura: A Decifração*. Direcção Geral de Inovação e de Desenvolvimento Curricular. Lisboa: Ministério da Educação.
- [8] Citoler, S. D., e Sanz, R. O. (1997). A leitura e a escrita: Processos e dificuldades na sua aquisição. In Rafael Bautista (Ed.), *Necessidades Educativas Especiais* (pp. 111-134). Lisboa: Dinalivro.
- [9] Correia, L. (1991). *Dificuldades de Aprendizagem: contributos para a clarificação e unificação de conceitos*. Porto: Associação dos Psicólogos Portugueses.
- [10] Cruz, V. (1999). *Dificuldades de Aprendizagem: Fundamentos*. Porto: Porto Editora.
- [11] Rebelo, J. (1993). *Dificuldades da leitura e da escrita em alunos do ensino básico*. Rio Tinto: Edições Asa.
- [12] Ribeiro, M.F.A.D. (2005). *“Ler bem para aprender melhor”: um estudo exploratório de intervenção no âmbito da descodificação leitora*. Braga: Universidade do Minho – Instituto de Educação e Psicologia.
- [13] Niza, S. (2004). A Acção da Diferenciação Pedagógica na Gestão do Currículo. *Escola Moderna*, 64-68. n.º 21, 5ª série.
- [14] Santana, I. (2000). Práticas Pedagógicas Diferenciadas. *Escola Moderna*. n.º 8, 5ª série.
- [15] Cadima, A. (1996). Diferenciação: no caminho de uma escola para todos. *Noesis*.pp.48-51. Lisboa: IIE
- [16] Grave-Resendes, L. e Soares, J. (2002). *Diferenciação pedagógica*. Lisboa: Universidade Aberta.
- [17] Henrique, M. (2011). Diferenciação Pedagógica: da teoria à prática. *Cadernos de Investigação Aplicada*. 5. 167-187
- [18] Perrenoud, P. (1999). *Pedagogia Diferenciada, das Intenções à Prática*. Porto Alegre: ARTEMED Editora.
- [19] Roldão, M.C. (1999). *Currículo e Gestão das Aprendizagens: as palavras e as práticas*. Aveiro: Universidade de Aveiro.
- [20] Sá, L. (2001). *Pedagogia diferenciada – uma forma de aprender a aprender*. Grafiasa.