



**COUNSELLING INTERVENTION IN READING PROBLEMS OF
SCHOOL CHILDREN**

BY

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Abstract

It is evident from teaching experience that teachers do encounter children who manifest learning problems in their classes. Such problems range from basic reading skills, oral expression to listening comprehension among several others. Dyslexia refers to difficulty in recognition and pronunciation learning of certain alphabets (letters) words by children, especially the beginners. This problem makes learning frustrating and uninteresting for the child while the teachers and parents, also have serious concerns. This paper therefore, attempts to create awareness on what dyslexia is all about its signs and symptoms, causes and also how to diagnose the problem of reading (dyslexia) among school teachers. Counselling intervention for remedying dyslexia by counsellor's teacher's parents are outlined. Recommendation on how to management dyslexia among school children is stated.

Introduction

Some school children do experience difficulties with learning from time to time under the normal educational setting. These difficulties are in the areas of basic reading skill, oral expression, listening comprehension and mathematics calculation are several others such children do lag behind with their mates and even labelled as slow learners. However, many teachers are not aware of these learning problems among their pupils/students and so no effects are made to help correct such difficulties. Other teachers may notice the difficulty which pupils/students show in the process of learning but tend to ignore them. Even parents are not left out, they either cover/life or give excuses for the difficulties which their children/wards are encountering with learning. All these factors only worsen the situation of the learner in a learning environment. If proper help is given early, some of the children/students may improve and get over the problem(s).

The focus of this paper is to create awareness on learning problems of pupils/students in schools with special attention to the area of reading disorder which is also referred to as DYSLEXIA. This is an inability to read. It is a physical condition that contributes to learning difficulties. Dyslexia or reading disorder is almost synonymous with the word "blindness" to some alphabets in which these suffering from it find reading and spelling of writing word difficult (Esere 2004). Oxford Dictionary (2005) define dyslexia as "a slight disorder of the brain that causes difficulty in reading and spelling, but does not affect intelligence. Feldman (2002) define dyslexia as a reading problem when a child is unable to make a connection between the written form of a word on a page and the sound of the word when it is spoken aloud. This is a specific problem in the brain that affects phonological processing.

Language is learn by hearing if spoken when a child hears a spoken sound he/she imitates the sound he/she have heard. When he/she learn to read, he/she builds on a vocabulary of words he/she has known by ear. Reading problem (dyslexia) occurs when a child cannot match the spoken sound he/she has heard with the written word on paper page for example, according to Durosaro (1995) the symptoms of dyslexia include the tendency to confuse letters such as b and d, u and n, m and w, p and q children also read was for saw, dog for god etc. This type of problem makes learning to read hard (difficult). The cause of the difficulty is dyslexia.

Reading, according to Feldman (2002) is a complex process that involves;

1. Scanning the alphabetical letters in the correct order of left to right.
2. Transmitting these letters in sequence to the brain for processing
3. Recognizing the distinctive grouping of letters that makes a particular word. That is, it include identifying the individual letters in whatever font or hand-writing they appear.
4. Comparing that grouping to known words stored in the memory to identify both sound and the meaning of the whole word
5. Retaining that meaning and connecting it to those of the rest of the words in the sentence to develop a full understanding of the writer's meaning.

6. Completing the entire process in a fraction of a second, as the eye moves on to the next sentence

Thus, for dyslexia children, the core problem between a group of letters on a page and a word that they know by its sound. Reading difficulties in children/students appear when they cannot decode the words. They omit letters of some words or add to a sentence and have trouble decoding.

Types of Reading Disorder (Dyslexia)

According to Esere (2004) the different types of dyslexia include;

- a. Auditory dyslexia which connotes inability to adequately process auditory information
- b. Visual dyslexia refers to inability to comprehend visual stimuli
- c. Receptive dyslexia occurs when a child is unable to comprehend what he/she reads.

Reading problems in children are not hard to notice. For example, if you ask the dyslexia child to focus on words, he/she would act uninterested in the task of reading. When you do get him/her to focus on the words, the difficulties area will be evident.

Signs and Symptoms of Dyslexia

According to Learne (1991) and Feldman (2002) reading tires the child greatly as such, he/she reads very slowly and haltingly. The child manifests the following signs;

- a. Rubs eyes sequently
- b. Squints and tilts head
- c. Reads expression and ignores punctuations
- d. Follow the text on the page with a fore finger
- e. Leave out syllables, words, phrases or even lines of text
- f. Adds words or phrases that are not in the text
- g. Reverse the order of letters or syllables within a word
- h. Mispronounce words, including familiar words
- i. Substitute one word for another even if the substituted word is meaningless in the context
- j. Make-up words that have no meaning

Other signs of dyslexia are found in the writing form of children experiencing the disorder, according to Feldman (2002) as follows;

- i. They put letters in the wrong order within a word
- ii. They leave out letters from words (omit)
- iii. Add extra letters to words
- iv. Substitute one letter for another, even if the sound is dissimilar
- v. Write strings of letters that bear no relation to the sound of the intended words
- vi. Leave out punctuation

Learning to write according to Learner (1991) is not a mechanical reflex response, but a thinking process. Smooth motor coordination of eye and hand control of arm, hand and finger muscles are required in the process of writing and needed for legible results. Thus, school children need help in writing as well as reading for effective academic achievement.

Dyslexia Disorder

To determine the cause of dyslexia in children, Feldman (2002) recommended the use observation interviews and common sense to diagnose the problem. The basic steps are;

1. Talk to the child and gather impressions about his/her intelligence and personality. For example, ask a child to describe a typical day at school. This would expose his/her use of words in speaking and loop holes would pop out
2. Eliminate the possibility that the child has a developmental delay of some kind that would affect school performance by asking the parents questions about the child's early childhood. For example, when did he/she learn to sit up, crawl, walk; complete toilet training, feed him/herself, dress him/herself etc. if the child is very late in learning all or most of these things, it may suggest or signal developmental disorder
3. Test the child's reading ability: This will give an idea about the severity of the problem is his/her reading as his/her junior of two (2) or more years behind him/her.
4. Give the child a simple written mathematics problems to solve. This will expose his/her inability to transfer input of visual information to the output of fine motor movement and spatial judgements.

All children make these kinds of errors when they begin to learn to read and write. However, when the difficulties tend to persist, simply pointing out the mistakes does not help him/her correct the errors. When help seems not to come or is insufficient, the child becomes frustrated and starts to dread or fear classes that involve reading. Their frustration may take the form of bad behaviour, anger, clowning or withdrawal from classes or even school. The child may also become disruptive in class whenever one is engaged in silent reading. Some children (dyslexia) may dislike school so much that they make excuses to stay at home rather than come to school.

Counselling Treatment

Dyslexia or reading disorder is a learning problem which is common with beginners of schools. Therefore, teachers and counsellors of the beginners class(es) should note the following;

1. Teachers Role: teachers are imparters of knowledge, therefore, to help a child with reading and learning problems, the teacher should be able to teach reading to children using the whole word approach. That is, teachers are to learn to accommodate dyslexic children in the classroom and try to understand what dyslexia means and how children experience it. When a teacher is giving out written instructions for an assignment, he/she can read it over to the class, to ensure that everyone knows what is expected or allow a non-dyslexic child to

read aloud quietly the instructions to a dyslexic child. Also, the teacher can tape materials for dyslexic children to take certain tests orally. The teacher should ensure that the dyslexic child has extra time to complete written work in class or to read an assigned passage from textbook. Teachers should avoid asking dyslexic children to read aloud in class.

Furthermore, reading remediation for dyslexic children is largely to help them connect the sound of words to their written form. The teacher needs to spend time with the child and not just hand out assignment and expect the students to work through it without supervision. Teachers should ensure that children work on lists of individual words in isolation, but also make them read stories and articles that put words in context. Try as much as you can to give varied activities and encourage children to listen to say and write words as well as reading them silently.

The whole word approach means the use of phonics teaching method which helps children to recognize a word, spell it and pronounce it. The steps for teaching whole word are outlined as follows;

1. Teacher writes a word on the board
2. Read aloud to the learning of the child several times
3. Ask the child to say the word several times
4. The child should repeat the word until he/she can make the connection between the written word and the sound of the he/she knows.

The school authority should support the teachers of such children and even the dyslexic child to succeed in learning. Those without knowledge or training on how to teach this problem, should be encouraged to go for one.

The Counsellor Role

The counsellor as a helper is to create time and spend it helping and supporting the child learn to sound out letters individually and in different combinations from his/her school book. The following steps are recommended for use by counsellor to help their child with phonics and reading;

1. Try to set aside time everyday for reading
2. Postpone the session if the child is too tired, hungry or cranky to pay attention
3. Don't overdo it at first start with ten or fifteen minutes a day
4. Set achievable goals a page a day of a phonics book or a reader may be enough at first
5. Be positive and praise your child when he/she reads correctly. When he/she makes mistakes, be patient and help correct the error. If he/she hesitates allow time before you rush in to help
6. When you read a story together, make sure that the child not only sounds out the words, but makes sense of them too. Ask him/her what he/she thinks of the story or the characters
7. Start by reading the first few pages or paragraphs of a story aloud to get the child hooked his/her attention. Then, ask the child to read the rest of the story to find out what happens next

8. Vary the activity by spending time deling word games instead of reading or ask the child to make up a story, write it down for him/her and get him/her to read it back to you
9. Do not make these sessions a substitute for reading aloud to your child. If you always read to him/her at bed time. keep it up. It will help him/her associate books with enjoyment.
10. Reward him/her when he/she does well or when you see a real improvement in his/her school marks

As counsellor you have to prepare and invest your time, until the child is reading at the appropriate academic level. Surely, the end result which is improvement in performance and self esteem will pay off with time in your child's reading and learning.

Role of Counselling

Counselling is a helping profession which seeks the well-being of those who patronize its services. In school settings and especially with beginners counsellors should assist teachers and parents in the early diagnosis or identification of children with learning problems, and other needs in classes and in the school in general. This is crucial to fostering stable growth and development in teaching and learning. The school counsellor and the guidance counselling programme could therefore provide relevant and adequate services to these children in order to assist them to benefit adequately from teaching and learning experiences of the school.

In addition to early diagnosis, counsellors should design individual prescriptive programmes that outline the learning sequence of a children with the problem of dyslexia which teachers and parents can used. These include the individual approach teacher consultant role play approach, resource room services, picture method approach régular classroom service etc to encourage early exposure of children with dyslexia problem to training in education. The methods would go a long way in reducing the severity of their problems in learning.

Early therapeutic programme will also prevent the prolong suffering of the child in the hands of his/her teacher, classmates or parents at large.

It is also the responsibility of the school counsellor to assist parents to overcome the initial shock that their child has problems with learning and therefore may not be a good material for school. With such help in the area of being informed about what is dyslexia, what are the causes and how dyslexia can be treated at school and home, parents can learn to accept their children and work early towards providing them with the necessary support to make learning interesting and build positive self esteem. Also, parents should assist their children to develop healthy personality and a way of doing this is by accepting their circumstances show interest in their activities, learn to emphasize the strength of the child and avoid negative remarks which could injure the child with learning problems lower their morale and make them feel inferior or unwanted Olawale (2000) stated that learning to work effectively with parents is one of the important skills counsellors and other allied professionals can acquire in the management of learning problems in schools.

Recommendations

Since dyslexia is a problem of phonological processing, teachers, helpers as well as parents need to use the best ways to help children with problems of recognizing words and pronouncing them properly. The following recommendations are made;

1. Children with dyslexia should be helped to remedy their problems of recognizing word letters and pronunciation to improve their academic performance, this can be done through interact to the helper with children
2. Phonics teaching is the best method of remediating the problem of dyslexia in school children learning.
3. Counsellor teachers and parents should join hands together to work as a team in helping dyslexic children overcome their problems with school learning. This way the child would enjoy learning and develop positive self esteem among his/her schoolmates through group counselling.
4. School authorities should allow teachers especially of beginner classes acquire training in the method of managing children with dyslexic problems of learning in their classes (school).
5. Parents of children with dyslexic problems should support by acquiring workbooks (learning materials) that would help dyslexic children remedy their learning problems.
6. Parents of dyslexic children should try to persuade the school authority of their children schools to support the teaching of phonics to their children to help remedy such problems thereby, improve academic learning and self esteem of such children.
7. Teachers who have dyslexic children in their classes should persuade the school authorities to allow the teaching of phonics to help dyslexic children improve their learning.

Conclusion

To say that learning is not easy for some individuals, is saying the obvious. However, remediation for the problem of dyslexia is a matter of helping the child recognized and connects the sound of words to their written form. Therefore, counselling is very important to let the parents of such children know the basis of the problem and also let them know that it is nobody's fault; that it is something that can happen to anybody. Similarly, it is very important to link them up with other parents that have same problems as then. This would allow and enable them share experiences and knowledge about dyslexia with one another. If there is any new development, they would readily share it. This support group would be useful in efforts to expand access to quality education for all children including those without the problem of dyslexia.

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