

A Study of Writing Difficulties and Their Relationship to Oral Comprehension Among Primary School Pupils

دراسة صعوبات الكتابة وعلاقتها بالفهم الشفهي عند تلاميذ الابتدائية

Dr. Bekhti Karima¹

¹ University of Algiers 2 – Abou El Kacem Saadallah

Faculty of Social Sciences (Algeria), bakhti2099@gmail.com.

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Abstract:

This study aims to highlight the effectiveness of learning, which fundamentally relies on empowering pupils to master writing skills. Writing contributes significantly to the acquisition of motor skills, as well as the ability to analyze and synthesize information through the linear imitation of a model or observable written text.

Diverse orthophonic, cognitive, and pedagogical approaches have been employed to address writing learning difficulties. Many of these methods are based on remediating the deficits that lead to academic challenges, such as language and comprehension impairments. The latter is considered the primary factor facilitating the acquisition of knowledge across various domains. Oral comprehension is defined as the listener's accurate perception of the speaker's intended meaning; it is the capacity to understand words, a factor measured by assessing an individual's level of lexical knowledge.

Keywords: Writing Difficulty, Oral Comprehension.

ملخص:

تهدف دراستنا إلى إبراز فعالية التعلم، والذي يعتمد أساسًا على تمكين التلاميذ وسيطرتهم على مهارة الكتابة، فهي تساهم بقسط وافر في إكساب الطفل المهارات الحركية والقدرة على التحليل والتركيب من خلال محاكاته خطيًا لنموذج أو لكل ما يراه مكتوب أمامه. وقد تنوعت الأساليب الأرتوфонونية والمعرفية والتربوية في علاج صعوبات تعلم الكتابة عند التلاميذ، وقامت الكثير من الأساليب على أساس علاج القصور التي تؤدي إلى المشاكل الدراسية، مثل القصور في

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اللغة وفي الفهم، ويعتبر هذا الأخير العامل الأساسي الأول الذي يسهل تعلّم بعض المعارف والمكتسبات في شتى المجالات. ويعدّ الفهم الشفهي على أنه الإدراك الصائب من المستمع بمعنى ما يقصده المتكلم، وهو القدرة على فهم الكلمات ويقاس هذا العامل بالكشف عن مستوى معرفة الفرد لمعاني الألفاظ المختلفة.

كلمات مفتاحية: كلمة مفتاحية، كلمة مفتاحية، كلمة مفتاحية، كلمة مفتاحية.

Corresponding author: Dr. Bekhti Karima

1. Introduction

Throughout an individual's academic career, they encounter a range of obstacles and difficulties that generate significant pressure, particularly at the beginning of their schooling in the early primary years. Pupils face challenges—such as learning to read, write, and calculate—for the first time. Some struggle with acquiring this knowledge, while others overcome these hurdles through a correct and effective understanding of instructions. Among the problems pupils face is the disorder of writing difficulties, a specific type of learning disability. Writing is a linguistic skill dependent on a child's cognitive and mental faculties; it is a complex psycho-mental process that involves the ability to express oneself through written symbols and requires the integration of several sensory-mental operations. Correlational studies have indicated that good writers are also good readers (Allen & Cumming, 1998, p. 296).

However, a proportion of school-aged children encounter difficulty in acquiring and mastering this mechanism, which is termed "writing difficulty." This directly affects the rules of writing during the first years of schooling and manifests in various forms, such as inaccuracy in character formation, poor spelling, or the omission of certain letters and syllables (Ousama Mohammed Bataineh, 2005).

Furthermore, writing difficulties are closely related to cognitive processes, including comprehension, memory, and attention. However, previous studies have not fully explained the cognitive mechanisms required to identify the fundamental problem causing a child to suffer from writing

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difficulties; that is, they have not sufficiently analyzed the cognitive process under study. Comprehension in general, and oral comprehension in particular, is a cognitive process that helps the child develop their knowledge. As researcher Abdelhamid Khamsi defines it, oral comprehension is the ability and competence that allow a child to understand an event in an oral situation by utilizing strategies that enable them to respond to that event (Dahal Siham, 2006, p. 65).

Since the early 1990s, the concept of writing difficulties has become clearer, leading to an increase in research and the number of professionals working on diagnosis and treatment programs. Notable among these is the study by Giordano (1989), which aimed to identify and diagnose pupils with writing difficulties. The study sample consisted of two groups: one with writing difficulties and a control group of typically developing peers. The study utilized three techniques to analyze writing forms to identify the nature of the writing deficit: error analysis, linguistic difficulty discrimination, and word-building exercises. One of the most significant findings was that pupils with writing difficulties were capable of copying words but struggled with connected writing. Results also indicated statistically significant differences between typically developing children and those with writing difficulties in writing skills, favoring the former.

Additionally, Sharp's study aimed to uncover the relationship between speed and accuracy in connection with production in writing tasks. The sample consisted of 217 second- and fourth-grade pupils (with and without learning disabilities), who performed writing tasks involving mechanics (letter identification, word recognition, alphabet writing, word pronunciation fluency, and sentence pronunciation fluency). The study used a linguistic achievement test (reading-writing) and concluded that there were statistically significant differences between typically developing children and those with learning disabilities in linguistic achievement, favoring the typical group. Furthermore, Content (1996) argues that the relationship between oral comprehension and writing is simple, assuming that a single element exists—either through the written word recognition system or the oral word recognition system—that integrates all syntax and structures. The influence on the oral aspect remains crucial for explaining the ease or difficulty children face when acquiring writing. In the field of writing disorders, studies

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have shown a strong relationship between oral language disorders in the preschool stage and writing learning difficulties.

2. Definitions

Oral Comprehension: Relates to the understanding of vocabulary, word meanings, and the relationships between them. This factor develops from the beginning of the child's learning of language principles and symbols, as each linguistic symbol is linked to a specific meaning for the child.

Immediate Comprehension: This stage allows for the recognition of the child's linguistic lexical level and the assessment of their immediate comprehension, evaluated through three strategies: lexical comprehension, morphosyntactic comprehension, and narrative comprehension.

Global Comprehension: This stage aims to identify the child's behaviors based on strategies developed by researcher Abdelhamid Khamsi. It is related to immediate comprehension and is used to describe and evaluate the ability to utilize oral comprehension strategies, also divided into three strategies.

Writing: A linguistic communication skill; it is a linguistic, mental, and performative skill through which we can express feelings and thoughts and convey them to others in a clear style.

Writing Difficulties: A disorder in learners characterized by difficulty in remembering letters, following their movements, recalling words, and expressing thoughts. It results from impairments in visual-motor coordination, muscle harmony, and failures in retrieval tasks and the discrimination between linguistic concepts and their governing rules.

3. Definition of Oral Comprehension

There are several definitions of oral comprehension. Given that language is either read or spoken (auditory/oral comprehension), what

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applies to the oral aspect necessarily applies to the whole. Key definitions include:

(Guilford, 1977): Defines oral comprehension as the ability to perceive the meanings of words or ideas, representing one factor in the matrix of factors within the theoretical model of the structure of the intellect.

(Sayed Khairallah & Mohammed Zidan, 1989): Define it as a factor related to the ability to understand words, measured by detecting the individual's level of knowledge regarding the meanings of different terms.

(Clark & Clark, 1977): Oral comprehension is the listener's accurate perception of the speaker's intended meaning.

(Ahmed Hanoura, 1989): It is a capacity that enables the student to perceive the vocabulary of a language text correctly by understanding its meanings and grasping various relationships between parts of the text.

(Wafaa Abdel-Khaleq, 1985): Defines oral comprehension as the conscious perception of the meanings of words and phrases. She distinguishes between two types of perception: automatic unconscious perception—which is no more than involuntary imitation and retrieval of what the child hears—and conscious perception, which is termed "comprehension."

(Plaza, 1999): Defines oral comprehension as an activity that masks the reality of mental activities. When children are in a state of listening, they are in a state of constant mental activity, as oral comprehension requires complex, higher-order mental processes.

4. Stages of Oral Comprehension Development in Children

The first cry a child utters at birth is the initial manifestation of their ability to vocalize and marks the starting point of language emergence. The child quickly discovers they can scream to express various desires and needs, such as hunger, pain, or discomfort. The child then moves from crying to the "babbling" stage, which sometimes extends from 6 to 12 months. They begin to produce sounds like "dada" or "baba." By making the environment focus

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on these vocalizations, the child repeats a set of sounds consistently. They appear to enjoy listening to these frequencies, and the auditory feedback acts as support for repeating the sounds (Sayed Youcef, 1990, p. 87).

When the child learns to speak, the stage of fixing meanings to words begins, achieved through teaching and learning. When a child utters the sound "ba," the mother encourages them, repeating the sound while saying "baba" and pointing to the father. Thus, the child links the word to its referent. If the child sees their father, they utter "baba," and the word is reinforced by the joy of the adults. This is how the word is "born." By the age of about one, the child begins using a single word to signify what they want to express, which may consist of one or more syllables. By the middle of the second year, the child starts employing nouns frequently, followed by verbs and particles such as prepositions and pronouns. By the beginning of the second year, children start developing short, simple sentences, linking two or three basic words to form a meaningful sentence without adhering to grammatical rules. Gradually, the child begins to pay attention to spoken words, turns to the source of the sound, and performs the process of linking certain things or signals with hearing the sound (e.g., linking the opening of the door to a person entering). Gradually, the child reaches the process of comprehension, which begins with generalization and then moves to discrimination (Adnan Al-Atoum, 2004, p. 279).

Several studies have explored how a child acquires the meanings of language, such as the experiment by Nelson (1973). He concluded that meaning acquisition proceeds in stages. Initially, the child distinguishes a new object from a group—for example, a ball. This is the primary perception of the ball's function (rolling, bouncing, etc.). The stable characteristics that distinguish the ball from other objects are extracted and placed in the semantic center of the object. Finally, the child gives a name to this object. At this point, the relationship between the signifier and the signified becomes associative and persistent. Arabic studies also indicate that an Arab child begins to acquire most morphological forms at the age of four, and that the understanding and production of these forms improve with age. The practice of acquiring plural forms begins at age four (Ahmed Hassani, 2000, p. 15).

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5. Oral Comprehension Strategies

5.1 Immediate Comprehension

This stage enables the identification of a child's lexical-linguistic level. To estimate a child's level of immediate comprehension, it must be evaluated through three strategies, according to Abdelhamid Khamsi:

Lexical Strategy : This strategy allows for the understanding of an event based on word recognition and placing it in relation to the context of speech. The child is able to grasp the meaning of the text and provide an answer. A child typically acquires this strategy between the ages of four and a half (Ziri Nabil, 2007-2008: 40).

Morphosyntactic Strategy : This strategy focuses on processing complex linguistic units (sentences) from a morphosyntactic perspective. The child must be aware of all necessary transformations. To understand an event, the child must be able to establish the relationship between the noun and the verb, which is the baseline level of this strategy. They must also master other morphosyntactic variables that allow them to comprehend the event. This is of the utmost importance for pupils in constructing their reasoning and considering the nature of their responses to questions. A child between the ages of five and six can master this strategy.

Narrative Strategy : To understand events, this strategy requires the ability to sequentially process the temporal and causal structures applied within the strategy, which is specific to certain texts such as short stories. Thus, an "event" is defined as a complex linguistic unit. According to Conchen-Bacri (1978), this strategy can be applied to various traditional texts and stories. It can also be applied to more complex events in terms of morphosyntactic knowledge, with a seven-year-old child typically mastering this strategy effectively.

5.2 Global Comprehension

This stage was developed to identify a child's behaviors based on strategies proposed by the researcher Abdelhamid Khamsi. It is related to

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immediate comprehension and is used to describe and evaluate the ability to utilize oral comprehension strategies. It is also divided into three strategies:

Perseveration Behaviors : We find this behavior in younger children, corresponding to an inability to focus on the speech context during the initial presentation of an event. This indicates uncertainty regarding the correct answer and, consequently, a deficit at the cognitive-linguistic level. This strategy aims to determine whether the child has reached an understanding of the event's content.

Change of Designation Behaviors : A child can acquire this type of behavior through a second analysis of the event or the context of the speech. It can also be acquired through social behavior modeled by an adult. This allows for the intervention of another strategy: the sociocognitive strategy, which intervenes in the production of para-verbal cues and adult signaling, as well as processing the behavior that requires the child to change the designation in the case of an incorrect answer. Thus, this type of behavior does not require new knowledge, but rather social knowledge (Mohammed Meroud, 2007-2008: 143).

Self-Correction Behaviors : This type of behavior requires the acquisition of the social behavior that regulates it. This behavior allows the child to transition from the lexical strategy to the morphosyntactic strategy, and subsequently to the narrative strategy. A disorder in this process necessarily leads to a disorder in the immediate comprehension of events. The child's success in immediate comprehension strategies leads them to adopt this behavior when facing any problem, thereby developing their cognitive-linguistic level. This enables them to transition to more complex strategies. Self-monitoring requires positive performance in the learning process rather than passive performance, while pupils often show a lack of awareness of contradictions. Through this method, pupils learn how to examine scientific material before answering any question. The goal of self-monitoring is to reduce impulsive, unrefined responses and to persist in responding until the correct answer is reached through organized search, as pupils often do not know how to interact with the text effectively to obtain new information and connect it with their prior knowledge. Given that this study concerns children, we can categorize comprehension as follows: understanding and perceiving isolated letters; phonological comprehension

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(morphosyntactic); understanding and perceiving isolated syllables; understanding semantic and morphemic contexts using structural cues; understanding and discriminating isolated phonemes; the ability to segment the speech chain; recognizing speech units; understanding formulation and usage; word comprehension; building relationships between meanings and words; and discriminating between segmented elements at the level of tone and speech, such as laughing or questioning (Ziri Nabil, 2007-2008: 41).

6. Concept of Writing Difficulties

Writing is a learned skill that can be acquired by pupils as a mental activity based on thinking. Like any cognitive process, it requires the exercise of thought and significant effort. Written language is a highly complex format because it involves written expression, spelling, and handwriting; these axes integrate to form the overall writing skill.

Meese (1995) believes that to achieve successful writing, pupils must apply oral language skills, reading skills, and the ability to think, organize a topic, spell words, and produce letters in a clear and legible script. However, pupils with writing difficulties often experience problems and disorders arising from shifts in writing skills.

Bain et al. (1991) define writing difficulty as a challenge resulting from a disorder in visual-motor integration. A child with this type of difficulty does not have a visual or motor impairment or disability, but is unable to convert visual information into motor output.

Hoy and Gregg (1994) point out that writing difficulties imply a student's failure to perform retrieval tasks—which refers to the student's ability to recall words—and recognition and discrimination tasks, which refer to the student's ability to correctly recognize the spelling of words.

Meese et al. (1995) add that pupils with writing difficulties are those who have mastered the mechanical and functional aspects of writing but do not complete writing tasks successfully.

Farouk Al-Rousan (1998) indicates that a child with a writing difficulty is a child who cannot correctly write the material required or expected of

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them based on their chronological age; they write at a level significantly lower than expected.

Kay (1999) defines it as a disorder in written language for expressing ideas during childhood, and it also refers to a disorder in written language in adulthood.

Kromer (1999) provided a vision of the errors committed by a student with writing difficulties, which include phonetic and visual errors, grammatical errors, and errors in division and context.

Nabil Hafedh (2000) mentions that writing difficulties constitute an inability to perform the movements necessary for writing—a condition associated with brain dysfunction.

Jamal Mithqal (2000) defines writing difficulties as the inability to express meanings and ideas through a set of written symbols.

Fathi Al-Zayat (2002) points out that a writing difficulty is a challenge in the mechanism of remembering the sequence and progression of letters, and subsequently the muscle harmony and fine motor movements required sequentially to write letters and numbers. Among its most important characteristics: it is not related to the individual's intelligence level; it is outside the control of teaching processes; it is less related to the content of their courses; it has a neuro-physiological basis of varying degrees; it is reflected in the individual's use of learning even in non-educational tasks; it varies in intensity, ranging from mild to moderate to severe; and it can be diagnosed, assessed, and treated if appropriate strategies are used in a timely and effective manner.

Martin Henley et al. (2004) add that writing difficulty falls under language learning disabilities, which means a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes in understanding or using spoken or written language, which may manifest in an imperfect ability to listen, comprehend orally, think, speak, read, write, and spell.

Through all these previous definitions, we can provide a comprehensive definition of the concept of writing difficulties: It is a disorder among learners in remembering letters and the sequence of their movements, remembering

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words, and the ability to express ideas, resulting from disorders in visual-motor coordination, muscle harmony, failure in oral comprehension tasks across its various immediate and global strategies, and failure in retrieval and discrimination between linguistic concepts and their governing rules.

Jamal Mithqal (2000) points out that the most important manifestations of writing difficulties are: mirror writing of letters; confusion in directions (e.g., starting to write words and syllables from the left instead of the right); incorrect ordering of letters and syllables; confusion in writing similar letters; difficulty in writing in a straight line; drawing letters incorrectly, whether by addition or omission; holding the pen in an incorrect way or holding it differently each time; neglecting dots on letters; and writing pronounced letters while neglecting unpronounced ones.

7. Contemporary Trends in Treating Writing Difficulties

Writing difficulties overlap, and each pattern affects the others. Therefore, addressing any of them through treatment, correction, or modification can positively contribute to the indirect correction of other skills.

There are numerous programs for treating writing difficulties in terms of their focus; some have focused on modifying visual-motor skills, others on improving visual-spatial perception and visual memory for letters and words, while others have focused on treating letter formation or analyzing the involved tasks. The current researcher will discuss some of the literature related to this part below.

Fathi Al-Zayat (2002) points out that the most common and widely used strategies for writing learning difficulties are developing immediate oral comprehension strategies (narrative, lexical, and morphosyntactic) and global comprehension strategies, which fall into three axes:

The First Axis (Accommodation/Adaptation): Focuses on reducing the impact of writing on cognitive learning.

The Second Axis (Alteration/Change): Relies on assignments and expectations related to the student's individual learning needs.

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The Third Axis (Remediation): Includes exercises and practices that contribute to improving writing.

Kirk and Chalfant (1988) mention a number of procedures designed to treat writing learning difficulties, including:

Training in Motor Models: The motor and sensory-motor approach to writing should be used for the purpose of producing letters and words automatically without visual control. Improving visual-spatial perception to overcome difficulties in recognizing the shape of the word as a whole.

Improving Visual Discrimination of Letters and Words.

Improving Visual Memory for Letters and Words: By re-imagining letters and words, and linking visual imagination with the sound of letters and words.

Treating Letter Formation: In which letters are taught separately through focused training and then in the context of writing.

Treating Writing Speed: By providing the opportunity for continuous practice of correct writing to enable the child to acquire the ability to write letters.

Reversal Errors: By repeating training on visualization and practicing writing over printed symbols to visualize memory.

8. Conclusion

Our study aimed to highlight writing difficulties and their relationship to oral comprehension among primary school pupils by empowering pupils to master writing skills. Writing contributes positively to the child's acquisition of motor skills and the ability to analyze and synthesize by linearly imitating a model or whatever they see written before them. Writing difficulties have a strong relationship with comprehension in general and oral comprehension in particular, which in turn helps the child develop their cognitive gains. Oral comprehension allows the child to understand an event in an oral situation by returning to the narrative, lexical, and morphosyntactic

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strategies that enable them to answer the event in writing, using perseveration behavior, designation, and then self-correction.

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