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**ARE THEY PROBLEM LEARNERS OR STUDENTS WITH
LEARNING DISABILITIES? WHAT DO TEACHERS KNOW
ABOUT LD?***

**SORUNLU ÖĞRENCİ Mİ, ÖĞRENME GÜÇLÜĞÜ OLAN ÖĞRENCİ Mİ?
ÖĞRETMENLER ÖĞRENME GÜÇLÜKLERİ HAKKINDA NE BİLİYORLAR?***

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Abstract

This research investigated the level of awareness and existing knowledge processed by general education instructors and counselors in a private school system regarding learning disabilities (LD) in Istanbul, Turkey. General education instructors who teach students from the age range of 5-19 in all subjects including English as Foreign Language practitioners as well as counselors who work with this population are the focus of this study. The main purpose of this study is to elicit current knowledge levels of learning disabilities awareness among teachers currently practicing in private school systems. The subsidiary purpose is to discern if learning disabilities in general or the targeting of specific disabilities should be the focus of training workshops and seminars.

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** Bu makale, Zürih'te 9-10 Eylül 2011 tarihlerinde düzenlenen, *Birinci Avrupa Öğrenme Güçlükleri* konferansı ve İstanbul'da 6-9 Temmuz 2011 tarihlerinde düzenlenen *Eğitimde Mükemmellik* konferanslarında sunulan bildirinin gözden geçirilmiş ve genişletilmiş biçimidir.

This study, therefore, is the first step of a needs analysis on this specific topic. One hundred participants who are currently working in this private school sector have completed a 25 question survey which was developed and piloted by Dr. Sheila Saravanabhaven of Virginia State University and Dr. RC Saravanabhaven of Howard State University and published in the International Journal of Special Education (vol. 25, no. 3, 2010). Permission for its use has been granted with the original survey to be administered. Additionally, the counselors currently administering to this populous were interviewed and asked specific questions regarding their preparation in the area of learning disabilities. The quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS and for the open-ended questions content analysis was applied. The analysis pointed to some discrepancies among awareness levels of educators with the focus of examination on pre-service courses required while pursuing a degree in Education as well as professional development exposure regarding learning disabilities awareness. The results of this study together with its implications on teaching and learning process show that in order to gain more awareness there is a need for teachers of all subjects to go through training workshops and seminars focusing on various types of learning disabilities which would eventually affect their student body. Special Education courses in the undergraduate teacher education programs should also put more emphasis on these issues.

Key Words: Learning Disabilities, Private School Teachers, Special Education.

Öz

Bu araştırma, İstanbul ilindeki özel okullarda görev yapmakta olan öğretmenlerin özel (özümlü) öğrenme güçlükleri ile ilgili farkındalık seviyelerini ve bu konu hakkındaki bilgi düzeylerini belirlemek üzere yapılmıştır. Araştırmanın hedef kitlesi, 5-19 yaş arası öğrenciye hitap eden aralarında İngilizce öğretmenlerinin de olduğu her alandan öğretmen ve rehber öğretmendir. Araştırmanın başlıca amacı, özel okul sektöründe çalışmakta olan öğretmenlerin öğrenme güçlükleri konusunda hali hazırda sahip oldukları bilgi düzeylerini belirlemektir. Bir diğer amaç ise, öğretmenlerin hizmetiçi eğitimlerinde öğrenme güçlükleri konusunun üzerinde durulması gereği olup olmadığıdır. Yani, başka bir deyişle, bu çalışma bu konudaki bir ihtiyaç analizi niteliğindedir. Virginia State University'den Dr. Sheila Saravanabhaven ve Howard State University'den Dr. RC Saravanabhaven tarafından geliştirilip, pilot uygulamaları, geçerlik ve güvenilirlikleri de yapılarak, the International Journal of Special Education (vol. 25, no. 3, 2010) dergisinde basılan 25 soruluk anketin kullanım izinleri alınmış ve original ankete ulaşılarak İstanbul'da özel okullarda çalışmakta olan 100 öğretmene anket uygulanmıştır. Ayrıca, aynı grupta görev yapmakta olan rehber öğretmenlerle de yüz-yüze mülakatlar yapılmış ve kendilerine öğrenme güçlükleri ile ilgili yaptıkları hazırlıklar, edindikleri bilgiler sorulmuştur. Nicel verilerin analizinde SPSS programı, nitel verilerin analizinde ise içerik analizi yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Yapılan analizler sonucunda, eğitimcilerin öğrenme güçlükleri konusundaki farkındalık

seviyelerinde farklılıkların bulunduğu belirlenmiştir. Araştırmanın sonucunda, öğretmenlerin bu konuda daha çok farkındalığa sahip olabilmeleri için eğitimler almaları gerektiği, lisans programlarında bu konunun, Özel Eğitim gibi derslerde, daha derinlemesine işlenmesi gerektiği ortaya çıkmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Özel (Özgül) Öğrenme Güçlükleri, Özel Okul Öğretmenleri, Özel Eğitim.

Introduction

Being an educator in this day and age is a challenging proposition. Years of studying and commitment has formed many of us into the professional teachers we are today. It could be said that the main reason why so many of us take up this challenge is due to our love of children and learning. We strive to provide the best possible classroom atmosphere and instruction in the attempt to touch the lives of our students. Unfortunately, there are students which we are unable to reach. There are moments of stark realization that what we are doing is not being grasped and we find ourselves facing a dilemma and asking ourselves "is it me or is there something else which is stopping the information I am giving from being processed". At this point, a teacher could very easily label a student as problem learner, lazy or unmotivated or attempt to seek answers. There very well could be issues of demotivation from time to time but if this predicament persists, then the possibility of a learning disability does exist. There are various types of learning disabilities which could be hindering students' ability to learn.

For many teachers who have not had an opportunity to be exposed to training concerning learning disabilities, it is hard to understand exactly what they are. In 1977, the U. S. Office of Education released the following definition:

"Specific learning disability" means a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations (Mercer, 1996, p. 218).

The above definition helps us to understand why this phenomenon may be occurring and perhaps how it could manifest itself but what are the signs that a teacher should be aware of?

Children at different levels of education display different patterns which may indicate a learning disability. In preschool, a focus on signs of slow vocabulary growth, delay in speech development, poor coordination, restlessness and distraction as well as problems interacting with peers would be displayed. At the elementary level, there are numerous indicators which include: problems connecting letters and sounds, forming

letters and numbers, making mistakes while reading aloud, letter reversals, losing or forgetting materials, and poor coordination. At the High School level, a teacher could see difficulties in understanding discussions or expressing thoughts, organizing personal space, and an avoidance of reading tasks, reading out loud or writing assignments (Colorin Colorado, 2008). The difficulty in identification lies in understanding that although many students could display one or more of the above from time to time, it is not until many of these indicators have been observed and documented over an extended length of time that real concerns should develop. Once it has been determined that a learning disability exists, the question then arises as to what specifically should be done. Let's turn our attention to America for these answers.

The United States of America enacted IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) in 1990 and with this new legislation declared "all students will receive free appropriate public education regardless of ability" (U.S. Dept. of Education). While this law ensures the educational setting for special education students (those with visual, hearing, mental or physical impairments) it expands upon earlier legislation. The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 also detailed the rights of those with special needs but also included those students who were identified as having Attention Deficit/Hyper Activity (AD/HD) disorder which is just one of the many learning disabilities (U. S. Dept. of Education website). It becomes clear to see the commitment to the success of those with learning disabilities as this issue has been a major topic in U. S. policy making for more than 30 years. President Obama supports this legislation and comments in a recent article published on February 14, 2011 entitled 'Investing in Early Education' on his commitment to the youth of America by investing \$374 million on early intervention programs within schools for children with disabilities (U.S. Dept. of Education, 2011). He recognized the importance of early identification and intervention and has provided support to all schools through programs which train staff, diversify learning for those identified, and inform parents at every step within this process. The U.S. Department of Education is doing their part and so are many other organizations which seek to foster understanding worldwide. Learning Disabilities Worldwide Organization was founded on the premise of promoting understanding and educating others throughout the world regarding LD. Their website offers a wealth of information and declares their dedication by continuing "to be instrumental in changing the world by bringing hope and support to individuals and their families with learning disabilities" (ldworldwide.org). It is through this extensive network of researchers and education professionals throughout the world that the tools available for educating all are being shared. We now have a better understanding of what other countries are doing regarding learning disabilities, but what could be said of Turkey?

The Republic of Turkey, Ministry of National Education has also committed to serving those students with special needs by providing legislation for schools which tailor instruction to this specific populous and much research has been published regarding inclusion of students with special needs into mainstream classrooms,

however there is very little research to be found regarding students identified with learning disabilities. While data has been collected through worldwide census work and percentages for those countries can be easily obtained, there remains no official data for Turkey. Every year the Ministry compiles the National Education Statistics report and for 2010-2011 it outlines the guidelines for early education, primary, secondary and special education programs but makes no mention of learning disabilities (meb.gov.tr). A report published in June 2005 outlines the Ministries Special Education program:

Educational opportunities are offered to children and young people in eight groups of special needs: visual, hearing, orthopedic, and mental disabilities, linguistic and speaking difficulties, adaptation problems, long-term illnesses and the gifted. In 2005, there are 21 239 students and 4419 teachers in 972 special education institutions with 31708 students attended integrated education in 7506 schools(oecd.org, 2005).

Interestingly, the gifted are listed above and this has attracted much attention in the press recently. An article entitled 'Turkish ministry examines education options for gifted children' printed in the January 19, 2011 edition of the Turkish Daily News appeared and discusses recommendations on policies toward the gifted and talented which will be submitted to the Ministry soon and claims that 2.5 to 3 percent of the population of Turkey are gifted or talented (Turkish Daily News, 2011). With so much being done for those with special needs and new movement to provide support for those identified as gifted, one wonders what information exists concerning inclusion of students with special needs in mainstream or public classrooms. Fortunately, there is a large body of research which has asked just this question. An article by Asst. Prof. Dr. Hakan Sari describes a movement away from segregation toward inclusion in regular classes and questions the mainstream teachers' beliefs about this inclusion. The findings indicate that lack of resources; inappropriate curriculum, inadequate physical access, and lack of parental involvement are found to be causing concerns for educators (Sari, 2005). A separate article published in the *European Journal of Special Needs Education* studied teachers' attitudes regarding inclusion and recommends modification of current educational policies and practices of Turkey (Rakap, 2010). Again, it must be remembered that, although Turkey has made considerations for those students with special needs and the gifted, there is very little being done or to be found concerning identification and awareness of learning disabilities in either the public or private school setting. This information gives one cause to stop and wonder what an educator could do for those students who have been seemingly lost in the Turkish education system.

Being aware that there are students which learn differently due to a potential learning disability is a starting point for change to occur at the classroom level. Larson-Freeman (2000, p. 169) supports this contention by reminding all that awareness is the

first step towards being able to change our teaching practice. Root (1994) adds “many of us work in settings where we do not have ready access to consultation, guidance or referral advice and special needs professionals” (Root, 1994). With this being said, it becomes clear that educators would require training in not only identification of but also the use of a variety of strategies in order to serve their students who display signs of one or more Learning Disabilities. Levine comments “looking at the learning disability is too limiting; we need to look at the profile of strengths and weaknesses and then play to each individual’s strengths” (Root, 1994, p. 2). A strategy mentioned in numerous articles draws attention to the use of Howard Gardner’s work on multiple intelligences. Gardner identified seven intelligences: linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, musical, kinesthetic, interpersonal and intrapersonal (Root, 1994, p. 4). Looking to the seven intelligences while planning and creating a plan for an individual which displays problems associated with a possible LD proves especially beneficial as it allows the teacher to expose the student to learning which focuses on the strengths of that student. Betty Edwards has also been mentioned as her work and research focuses on the brain and how it functions. Many researchers support the theory that a learning disability interferes with the ability in storing, processing and producing information. She describes the functions of the brain as “the left being involved in verbal, analytical, symbolic and abstract functions and the right side as being responsible for non-verbal, non-rational, spatial and holistic functions” (Root, 1994, p. 4). Overall, LD online provides the teacher faced with the challenge of finding a way to reach students of all abilities with this recommendation: “Teachers can improve the learning climate for many students and most assuredly for those with a learning disability by planning tasks so that differing intelligences are called upon and by balancing the involvement required of each hemisphere of the brain” (Root, 1994, p. 5). The implication of the above statement relies on not only the classroom teacher but involvement on an administrative level as well as the involvement of educational policy makers as individual teacher’s often do not have the freedom to change curriculum without their approval.

Taking all these into consideration, the main purpose of this study was to elicit current knowledge levels of learning disabilities awareness among teachers currently practicing in private school systems. The subsidiary purpose was to discern if learning disabilities in general or the targeting of specific disabilities should be the focus of training workshops and seminars.

Method

In this study, basically quantitative research design was used. During the fall semester of 2010-2011, one hundred participants who were working in private school systems within Istanbul completed a 25 question survey which was developed and piloted by Dr. Sheila Saravanabhavan of Virginia State University and Dr. RC Saravanabhavan of Howard State University. For the qualitative part of the research study, 3 counselors were interviewed in order to get more detailed data regarding their

views on learning disabilities. These counselors were also asked specific questions regarding their preparation in the area of learning disabilities.

Participants

The participants in this study were 100 teachers in private school systems within Istanbul, Turkey. The research study encompassed students from the age of 5 to 19 which constituted educational levels from preschool to university preparatory classes. It should be noted that the demographic information reflected that the majority of the participants were female (12 Male, 88 Female teachers) from various age ranges and educational background. These participants were general education instructors including English as Foreign Language practitioners as well as counselors who work with this population.

Data Collection Instrument

One hundred participants who are currently working in the private school sector have completed a 25 question survey which was developed and piloted by Dr. Sheila Saravanabhaven of Virginia State University and Dr. RC Saravanabhaven of Howard State University and published in the International Journal of Special Education (vol.25, no. 3, 2010). Permission for its use was granted with the original survey to be administered. The survey was applied both in English and in Turkish. Additionally, the survey was translated by three EFL instructors, back translated with two other instructors and piloted with 20 students at an MA TEFL program at a Foundation university in Istanbul. 3 counselors were also interviewed to get more detailed data related to this issue.

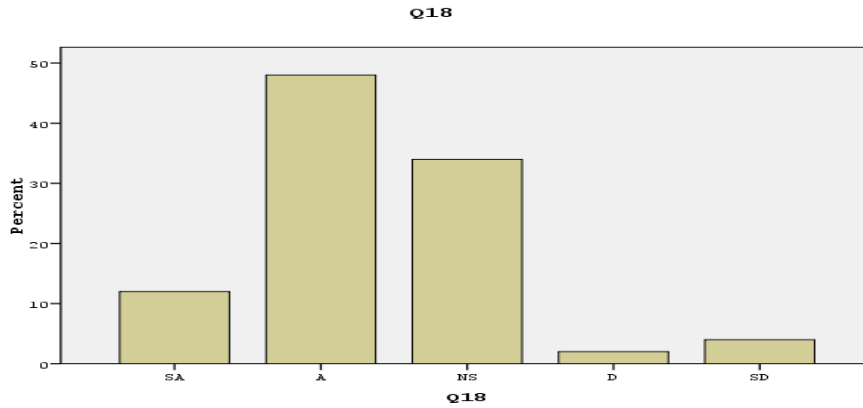
Data Analysis

The quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS 15.0 for windows. Educators' levels of awareness and existing knowledge of learning disabilities were examined. The interview questions asked to the counselors were analyzed using content analysis. The five stages of content analysis developed by Strauss and Corbin (1990) were applied for the analysis of the interviews. The data was coded; common themes were identified and organized, interpreted and reported.

Findings and Results

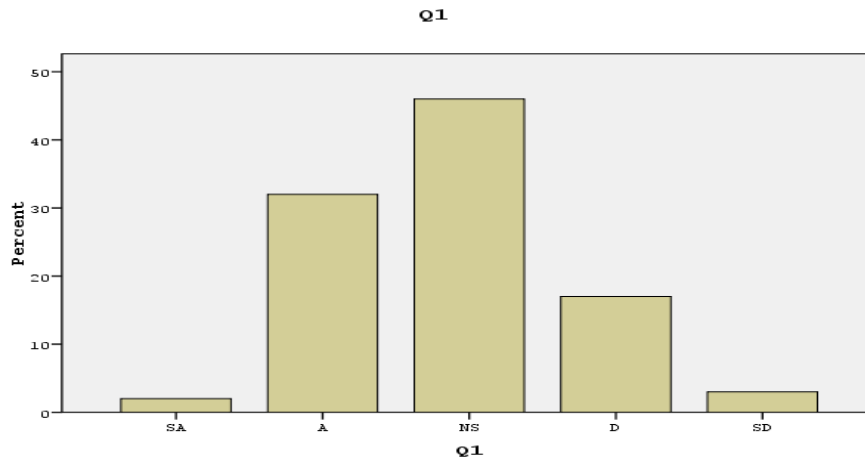
The results of the 25 item Likert-type survey with a scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree provided the researchers an understanding of current knowledge levels within a Turkish private school system regarding definitions and characteristics of learning disabilities (LD) which could be utilized in the identification of a potential disability in a student. Educators understanding of key LD terminology are shown in Table 1. Strongly disagree is shortened to SD; disagree is shortened to D; not sure is shortened to NS; agree is shortened to A; strongly agree is shortened to SA.

Table 1: Statement: Dyslexia, dyscalculia and dysgraphia are different types of learning disabilities.



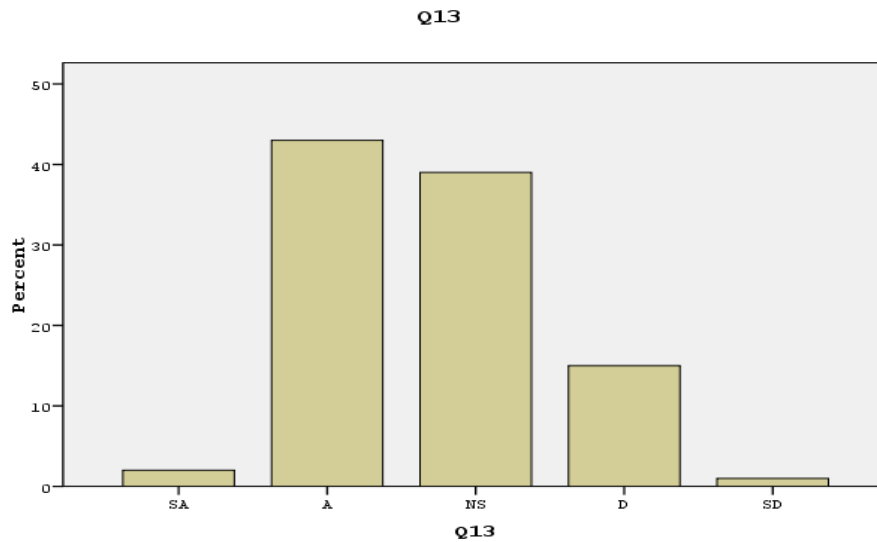
It can be said that most participants either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement which indicated at least an elementary level of understanding of terminology. However, a relatively large percentage, 33%, was not sure. As the majority of participants were educators who received their formal teacher training within the Turkish university system, it could be said the area of learning disabilities was not a provision or area which they were exposed to. It is important to note that an article by Dr. Atilla Cavkaytar *Teacher Training on Special Education in Turkey* sheds light on this issue by stating “Special Education services are provided by the teachers who are educated and trained at various educational institutions and the ones who are educated in the field of Special Education are certainly the most important ones for improving special education services effectively” (Cavkaytar, 2006). Thus, it could be argued that those who pursue higher education in the field of Special Education were exposed to terminology. As the teachers of this survey indicated that they did not pursue a degree in Special Education, their knowledge level of LD terminology indicated a lack of exposure at university. However, the three school counselors all indicated during their individual interviews that they understood the above terminology as this was included in their preparation courses. When asked to give a definition of each of the above, they were able to do so.

Table 2: Statement: Persons with a learning disability have average to above-average intelligence.



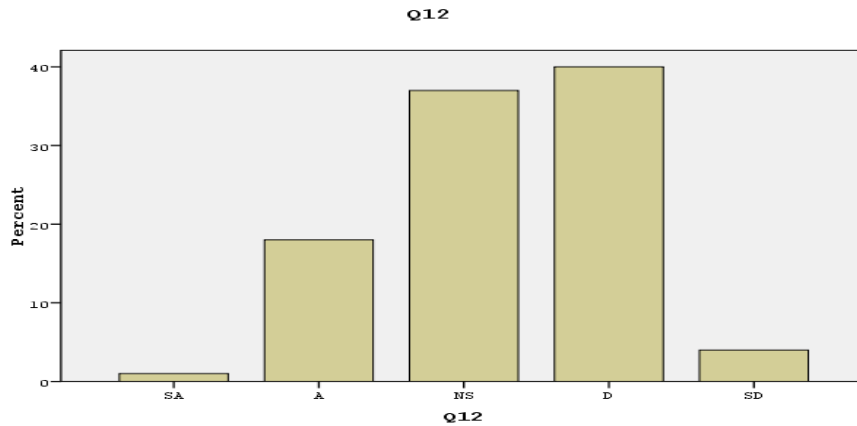
It can be seen that slightly more than 30% of participants agreed, just under 20% disagreed, very few strongly agreed or disagreed and just less than half of the participants were not sure. The lowest marks for SA and SD could indicate a lack of confidence in the participants' knowledge of determining intelligence levels in general which could have motivated many to respond of NS. The terminology of above and above average intelligence could also have been new to many as the testing and identification of intelligence levels is typically not performed by a classroom teacher. Counselors and/or psychologists are trained and administer such testing or screening, primarily during the registration of a student in preschool or lower primary. As four participants were school counselors and their data was combined within the group, it is difficult to state if their results hindered a clear view of the results. One must also consider that the majority of participants were English teachers who were providing second language instruction. In the article by Christine Root (1994), Martha-Sue Hoffman sheds light on this situation by offering "it is not always easy to distinguish between permanent language-learning problems and normal second language problems". It seems that it would take a teacher trained to not only identify LD but also understand how LD would manifest itself in the second language classroom when taking intelligence levels into consideration.

Table 3: Statement: Learning disabilities are diagnosed by a psychologist in schools.



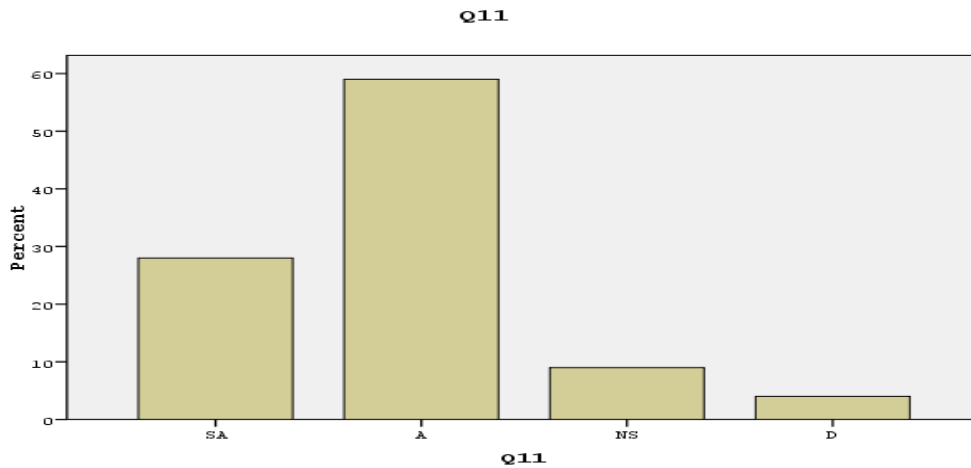
The high percentage of agreement that the school psychologist is responsible for the diagnosis of a learning disability is indicated. This supports the contention that many teachers may feel that they are not trained or responsible for diagnostic testing which is stated in Table 2. However, nearly 40% of the participants answered not sure. This indicates that there was confusion within the school system among the teachers. All of the participants were employees of a private school system which provided a school counselor for preschool, grades 1-4, grades 5-8 and High school. It was the policy of this school system that the counselors administer testing for school readiness and student abilities. This would explain the high percentage of agreement from staff that knew of the policy. However, many of the participants provided information of years of teaching experience and indicated a full range of responses with the majority stating two to five years. As many educators seek new positions each year, it can be said that the high percentage of not sure responses were given as the policy of each school may not have been given or understood. Additionally, the counselor interviews indicated that one of their responsibilities was to perform a parent meeting at the beginning of the school year in which the outline and procedures for evaluation of student readiness and potential were shared with those in attendance and in many schools the teaching staff would be present. Thus the high percentage of agreement would be accurate.

Table 4: Statement: Learning disabilities are diagnosed only by a medical practitioner.



Both Table 3 and 4 relate to educators knowledge of the responsibility of diagnosis of a learning disability. Table 3 shows relatively similar percentages for A and NS whereas Table 4 shows relatively similar percentages for NS and D. This supports the contention that once again teachers are unsure of who is responsible for diagnosis of a LD.

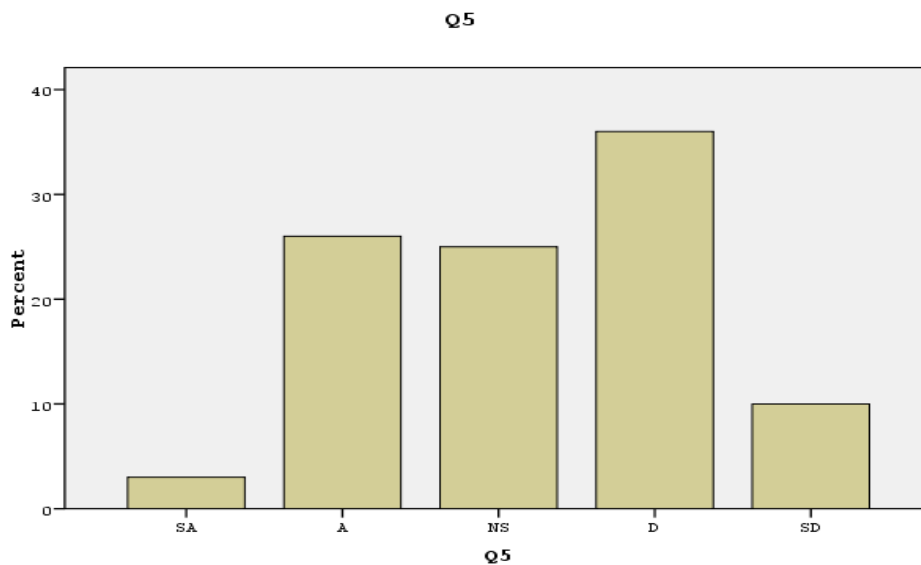
Table 5: Statement: Learning disabilities are found in all age groups.



Overwhelming percentages for SA and A are recorded. The high percentages pointed to some amount of knowledge of which age groups of students could be affected by a LD. As participants were exposed to students from various levels of education, it could be stated that many teachers are aware that students within every level could have a LD. When this data is compared to Table 1, it could be said that

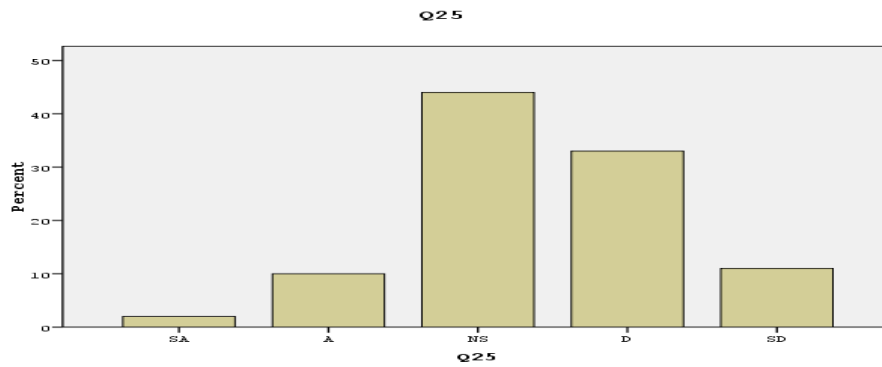
although many are not sure of the terminology of a LD, the participants do indicate a certain knowledge level of persons who could have a LD. It could be argued that although educators are aware of the possibility of LD at all ages, they do not have the capacity to correctly assess. Dr. Thomas Scruggs & Mastropieri (2002) provide the following insight in an article entitled *On Babies and Bathwater: Addressing the Problems of Identification of Learning Disabilities*, “many teachers argue that individuals with learning disabilities cannot be reliably distinguished from individuals with generally low achievement”. As the participants indicated that they all had a number of years of teaching experience as well as many indicating exposure to professional development, one could assume that the subject of LD could have been informally discussed thus allowing for elementary understandings of informal diagnostics of a LD. All of the counselors interviewed stated that they strongly agreed with the above statement.

Table 6: Statement: Some students with poor reading skills have a learning disability.



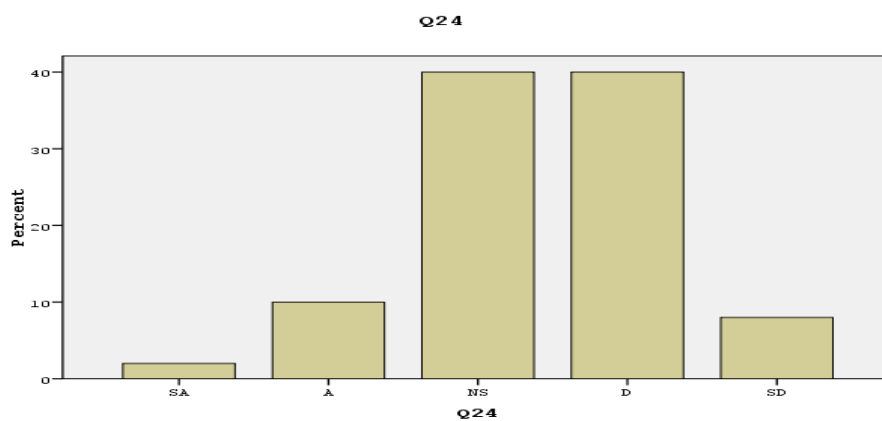
Although nearly 40% of the participants marked D, this table indicates that over 20% either agreed or were not sure. This data points to a lack of teacher knowledge regarding the relationship between reading capability and LD. As many of the participants show a lack of general knowledge of and school policy for LD, it could be stated that educators were not in the position to test or trained to identify a LD in their students. The above percentages would explain the lack of knowledge on the part of the educator of what skills would be affected by which LD. The counselors interviewed shared that as the student at the preschool level is tested for basic skills and school readiness and due to the age of the student a reading test is not administered. They expand upon this by stating that the responsibility of evaluating the reading levels of the students is that of the teacher of each level.

Table 7: Statement: All students with learning disabilities have attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).



The National Institute of Mental Health describes ADHD as one of the most common mental disorders in children and adolescents (Children’s Mental Health Awareness Fact Sheet). Our study showed equal percentages for A and SD are reported with 33% D, however, more than 40% of the participants indicated that they were NS. This could point to a lack of knowledge of the ADHD terminology or lack of exposure to a student who has been positively diagnosed. It could be said, although students may be tested by school psychologists, this area has not been provided for or if identified, may not have been given to the teaching staff. As many of the participants indicated numerous years of teaching experience, it is surprising to see such high levels of NS. Again, the area of teacher preparation courses may not have provided a firm understanding of all areas which are classified as LD.

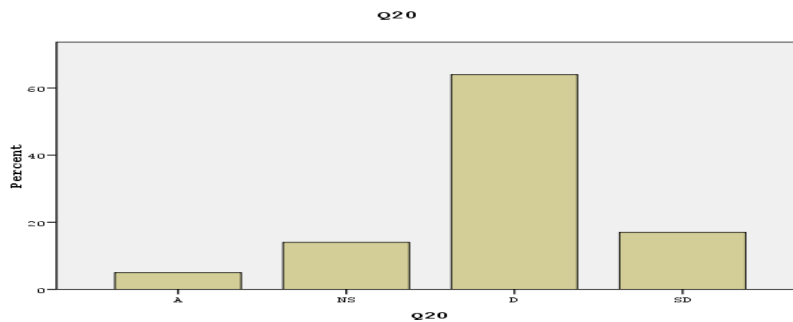
Table 8: Statement: All students with learning disabilities are visual learners.



Equal percentages for NS and D are recorded and analyzed. The score points to not only a lack of knowledge of a LD but a lack of understanding of the educational

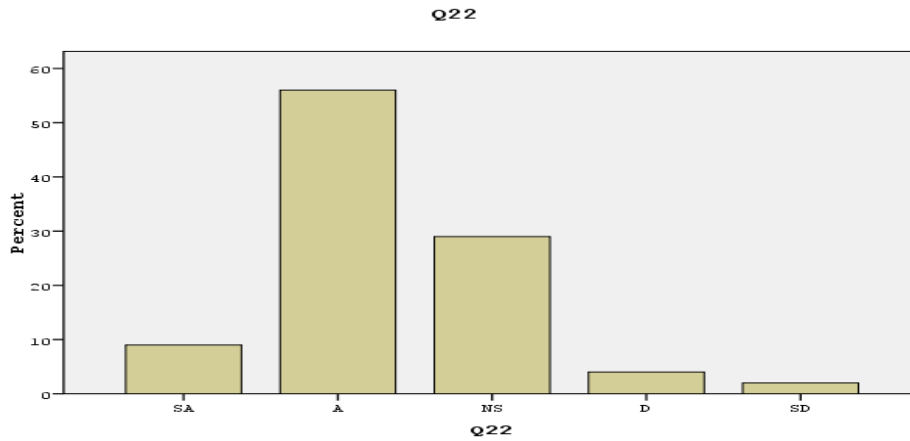
principle of multiple intelligences. An integral part of teacher education programs is exposure to the theory of multiple intelligences. This knowledge is highly valued as it is universally accepted that all humans do not learn in the same way but rather possess different intelligences. As 40% indicated NS, this points to a lack of knowledge of how a LD could affect a student's ability to process information in response to visual clues. In an article posted on Reading Rockets website entitled *Learning Disabilities, Dyslexia and Vision*, the importance of screening for vision issues prior to school enrollment was stressed. This study did not ask the question of whether or not schools have such a policy. However, it is worth noting that "vision problems are not the cause of dyslexia or learning disabilities" (2010). It could be thus questioned if a simple vision test is administered in Turkish private school systems.

Table 9: Statement: All persons with learning disabilities have weak social skills.



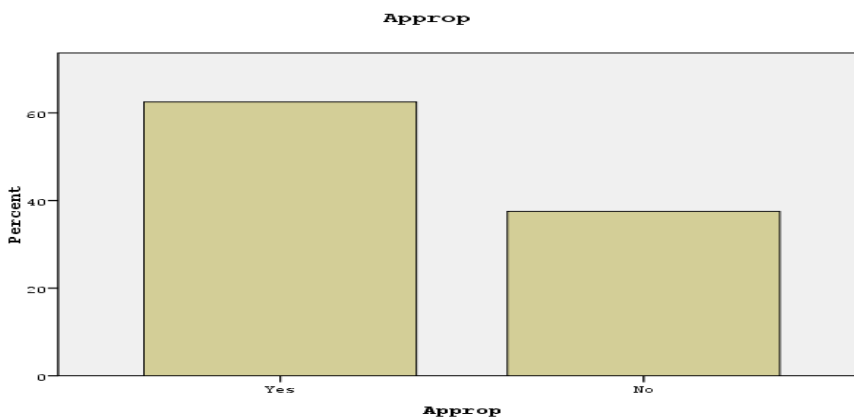
Over half of the participants responded with D which would indicate that educators in this study believe those with LD would not have low abilities to function socially or in a social setting. About 20%, however, were not sure or agreed with the statement. The overwhelming evidence points to an educator's inability to recognize an unsocial student and gives us a view into the mind set of educators who took part in this study. This generalization can be dangerous. A report from the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities from October 2006 states "systematic observations of a child's behavior and abilities over time are extremely important in order to support the reliability and validity of the hypotheses made regarding a child's behavior". As we look back at the Turkish legislation for LD, we can not currently see this systematic approach. Thus, it could be stated that as many of the participants with many years of teaching experience indicated that there is a tendency to classify those students who display below average social skills to possess a LD. The counselors interviewed responded that students who displayed below average social skills do not necessarily have a LD and that cultural factors are very often the cause of weak social skills with peers.

Table 10: Statement: The curriculum for students with learning disabilities may include social skills training.



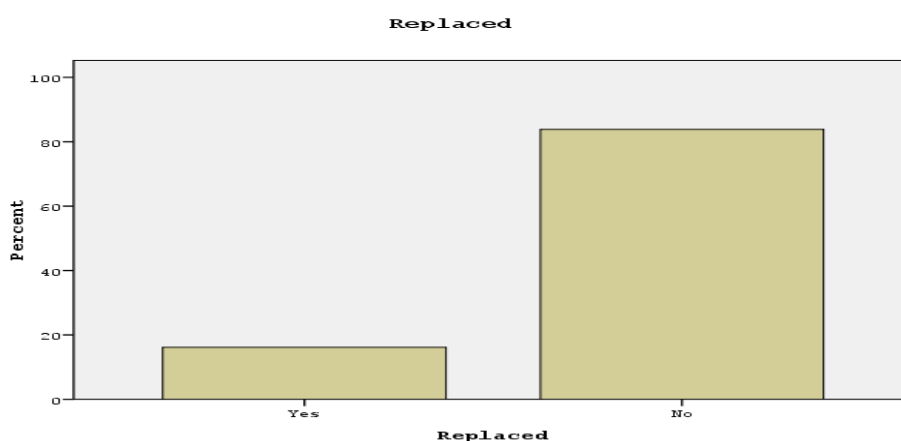
More than 50 % of those surveyed are of the belief that the curriculum for LD students would have a social skills training component. This contention is interesting when compared to Table 9. The tables show a contradiction. The majority of the participants felt that students with a LD do not display poor social skills with peers or in social environments. However, when taking the results of Table 9 and 10 into consideration, it could be said that the participants of this study could not identify a potential LD just by viewing a student who isolates themselves or does not interact with others well. Additionally, how an educator proceeds may vary as formal training for LD and past teaching experiences influence their evaluation of their students. Once again the procedures of how to identify through documentation and how to proceed forward are not clear for educators.

Table 11: Statement: Is the term 'learning disability' appropriate to the Turkish cultural context?



It can be seen that 64% of educators are of the belief that the terminology is appropriate. However, 36% were opposed to the term. The counselors interviewed all agreed with this statement.

Table 12: Statement: Would you like to have the term ‘learning disability’ replaced by something else?



The majority indicated that they would not replace the term ‘learning disability’. This percentage supports Table 11. For those who responded with ‘yes’, they were asked to provide an alternative. The following list was provided: *learning difficulties, challenged learning, learning problem and inability to learn*. The participants who provided an alternative did write on their questionnaire that they strongly opposed the term ‘disability’ as those in the Turkish culture relate a physical handicap to the word. They went on to comment that ‘disability’ would be a label that once placed on a student would remain with them throughout their school life. Essentially, there is a stigma for the use of the word ‘disability’ which once placed on a student by the school, would reflect badly on the school system and staff.

Conclusion and Implications of the Findings

The results of a 25 item Likert-type survey with a scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree provided the researchers with an understanding of current knowledge levels within Turkish private school systems regarding definitions and characteristics of learning disabilities which could be utilized in the identification of a potential disability in a student.

The Turkish Ministry of Education has recently focused attention on the diagnosis of learning disabilities in school aged children within Turkey. The results of this study together with its implications on teaching and learning process show that in order to gain more awareness there is a need for teachers of all subjects to go through training workshops and seminars focusing on various types of learning disabilities which would eventually affect their student body. This study therefore sheds light on

existing knowledge concerning learning disabilities in the classroom over many age classifications. Limitations include surveying only 100 teachers with regard to awareness of what disabilities are and does not take into account that a few participants received teacher training overseas where Special Education courses were part of syllabus. Many of the participants were female and as such data from male teachers could not be compared. Results of this study can guide professional development efforts in the attempt to build and reinforce learning disabilities knowledge in regard to reaching all individuals and recognizing their strengths and empowering them.

Providing “awareness opportunities” for teachers as well as the parents is a must if we want to create awareness on this important issue which could easily turn an individual’s life into a nightmare and develop a false self-belief regarding his/her worth as a human being. No human being deserves such a thing.

There are also some schools which do not accept students with LD if diagnosed during the interviews conducted before being admitted to the school. This specific condition deserves to be researched in order to figure out the motives of the administrators for not accepting students with LD. This could be another research topic for future studies.

For now, it could just be recommended that LD training be included into teacher education curriculum. “Methodology” courses, “School Experience” and “Practicum” courses can be appropriate for dealing with LD and all kinds of individual differences related to students. Special Education courses in the undergraduate teacher education programs should also put more emphasis on these issues. Only then can we empower students on the way to achieving more at school, in life and serve as whole individuals. In-service teacher training seminars are also important for such awareness raising sessions. It should be said in the light of the research findings of this study that especially experienced teachers need to be the target group of these awareness seminars/workshops.

“No child is ‘perfectly’ whole in mind, body, spirit, ability... nor can any child meet all of a parent’s hopes and expectations. Yet there is a wholeness of each and every child, a wholeness that is unique and brings with it a unique set of possibilities and limitations, a unique set of opportunities for fulfillment.”

-Fred Rodgers (Mr. Rodgers Neighborhood)

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