



Anxiety Problems in Students with Learning Disabilities

Mahnaz Akhavan Tafti

Department of Educational Psychology, School of Education & Psychology, Alzahra University, Tehran, Iran.

Published: 1 Oct 2014

Abstract

This paper provides an overview of the results of research related to anxiety disorders within the context of learning disabilities. About 8% of the student population in Iran suffers from learning disabilities (LD). Most of the criteria for anxiety disorders in ICD-10 or DSM-IV-TR can be applied reliably and validly in individuals with mild-to-moderate learning disabilities. Besides the clinical cognitive and physiological features of anxiety in LD students usually the most common behavioral manifestations of anxiety are avoidance and absenteeism. Anxiety problems may directly affect child's learning due to the initial cognitive deficits or by indirectly influencing achievement by undermining the resources children have to overcome their learning difficulties. This article presents the results of two separate studies using different intervention programs (VAKT and relaxation and cognitive-behavior therapy), addressing learning difficulties and anxiety problems in students with learning disabilities in Iran. Two groups of second through fourth graders, with a prior diagnosis of learning difficulties, participated in each study. One of the research samples consisted of six students. One student from each grade was randomly assigned to the experimental and control group. An anxiety test and nine sets of spelling and reading tests (separate forms for each grade with the same difficulty level) were used as the pretest, posttest and follow-up test in these researches. In the 1st study the designed combined program was implemented for the experimental group for 14 two-hour sessions. In each session, program comprised of different fun, innovative, hands-on and grade-appropriate VAKT learning activities along with relaxation exercises. Exercises were used twice in every session. Sample of the 2nd research comprised of 22 LD students. 11 students were randomly assigned to experimental and control groups. The intervention phase for the experimental group started and continued for 12 two-hour sessions. The package included the individually designed cognitive-behavioral therapy and learning activities. In the 1st study to examine changes in dependent variables, the mean scores were calculated for the experimental and control groups, figures were drawn and looked for the indexes of level, variability and trend. For the 2nd study ANCOVA test was used ($F=58.62, P<0.001$). The results showed that the experimental group from both the studies benefited from the use of the intervention programs, with a significant decrease in learning problems and anxiety level. The joint effect of the programs look promising in promoting learning and reducing the anxiety problems in students with LD.

Keywords: Learning Disabilities, Anxiety, Multisensory Method (VAKT), Relaxation, Cognitive-Behavior Therapy.

*Corresponding Author: Mahnaz Akhavan Tafti

E-mail: makhavan@alzahra.ac.ir