



Teacher Training and Physical Education: Strategies for Addressing Learning Difficulties in Children

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ABSTRACT

Learning difficulties affect between 10% and 15% of school-age children, impacting their academic performance, emotional and social development. These children tend to focus on rewarding activities, such as video games or sports, avoiding routine tasks that demand sustained cognitive effort. This behavior makes it difficult for them to adapt to structured school environments and affects their self-esteem, increasing anxiety levels and the appearance of disruptive behaviors.

In addition to academic challenges, they face problems regulating emotions, such as low tolerance for frustration and stress, which limits their ability to interact socially and resolve conflicts. Interventions such as emotional regulation techniques and psychological support are essential.

Physical Education emerges as a key tool to address these difficulties. Exercise improves memory, attention, and emotional regulation, as well as fostering social skills through group activities. According to Lomas and Clemente (2017), moderate-high exercise programs have demonstrated significant improvements in behavior and cognitive abilities in children with learning difficulties. These strategies, together with an inclusive educational approach, are essential for their integral development.

Key words: Learning Difficulties, Physical Education, Teacher Training, Educational Inclusion, Academic Performance.ution.

1. Introduction

Learning is a complex process influenced by multiple factors that can hinder the progress of some students. According to recent studies, between 10% and 15% of school-age children have some type of learning difficulty, which impacts both their academic performance and their emotional and social development (López et al., 2021). These children tend to focus on rewarding activities, such as video games, sports, and movies, while avoiding tasks they consider routine or monotonous, leading to significant challenges in school settings where structured planning is demanded.

Learning is determined by biological, emotional, and social elements. However, children with learning difficulties encounter greater barriers, which affect not only their academic progress, but also their personal and social development. They tend to prefer activities that are rewarding to them and avoid those that involve sustained effort, thus complicating their ability to plan and set short- and medium-term goals.

These difficulties transcend the academic field and impact emotional and social aspects. According to Díaz del Cueto (2009), children with learning difficulties have high levels of anxiety (48%) and low self-esteem (60%), which can lead to disruptive behaviors and low commitment to school activities. The demands of organization and planning of educational environments tend to aggravate these situations, especially if they do not have strategies to manage emotions and behaviors. Therefore, collaboration between families, teachers and specialists is essential to create an environment that favors integral development.

This paper discusses how physical activity and inclusive education can be effective tools to address these challenges. In addition, the results of a study that evaluates the preparation of future Physical Education teachers to work with students who face these difficulties are presented.

Barriers and characteristics of students with learning difficulties

Students with learning difficulties face multiple challenges in their development. According to Miralles et al. (2017), they tend to have specific problems in areas such as reading, logical reasoning, and working memory. These difficulties not only hinder academic performance, but also cause frustration, affect their self-esteem and decrease their motivation.

A characteristic pattern of these children is the tendency to avoid activities that demand sustained cognitive effort. This behavior is associated with a lack of self-regulation skills and attention problems, particularly in tasks that they do not perceive as attractive. In contrast, activities that offer immediate rewards, such as video games or sports, capture their attention more easily.

For educators, this contrast poses the challenge of designing more engaging and meaningful school activities. One possible strategy is to incorporate learning approaches that are based on individual interests and motivations. However, this requires careful planning and a thorough understanding of each student's specific needs. Emotional regulation and the educational environment

In addition to academic difficulties, children with learning disabilities often face challenges in emotional management, which can manifest itself in: low tolerance to frustration; episodes of anxiety or stress, disruptive behaviors both in the classroom and at home.

These shortcomings limit their ability to resolve conflicts, interact with peers, and participate in group activities. Therefore, educational interventions must include an emotional component to help children develop these skills. Strategies such as emotional regulation techniques, breathing exercises, and meditation can be integrated into the school schedule. In addition, the support of psychologists and therapists is crucial to address emotional and behavioral needs.

Benefits of physical activity in learning

Physical Education provides a unique platform to support the cognitive, emotional, and social development of children with learning difficulties. According to Lomas and Clemente (2017), physical activity has positive effects in areas such as memory, attention, and emotional regulation. This is especially beneficial for children who face challenges in these areas.

Physical exercise promotes brain plasticity, helping to establish new neural connections. For example, regular aerobic activities have been shown to improve the ability to concentrate and the speed of processing information, being particularly useful for those who have attention or memory problems. In addition, physical activity regulates stress by releasing endorphins, promoting a better mood and reducing anxiety. These activities also teach cooperation, self-control, and problem-solving skills, especially in group contexts.

2. Methodology

This study examines how future Physical Education teachers in Spain and Portugal are prepared to care for students with learning difficulties. Through a quantitative approach, the perceptions of 150 undergraduate students were evaluated, using a specific questionnaire designed in Google Forms.

The questionnaire covered dimensions of theoretical training in special educational needs (SEN); practical training to implement inclusive strategies; Experience in activities designed to promote inclusion.

The data collected were analyzed using SPSS software, using tests such as analysis of variance and Student's t-test to identify significant differences between the groups.

3. Results

The results show that 42% of those surveyed considered training in attention to diversity to be deficient or very deficient. Only 35.8% rated it as very good. This finding highlights the need to improve training programs to include more robust practical components.

The analyses revealed significant differences in the perception of students in both countries: Spain: 42% rated SEN training as deficient and Portugal: Only 18% reported dissatisfaction in this area; therefore, the analysis of variance (ANOVA) showed a significant difference ($p < 0.05$) in the perceived quality of training, indicating that English programs tend to include more practical activities related to inclusion.

Table 1. Analysis of Variance

Source of variation	Sum of squares	Gl	Quadratic mean	F	Gis.
Regression	31,947	10	3,195	6,615	0,000
Residual	187,851	389	0,483		
Total	219,798	399			

Source: Own elaboration

Overall, 25% of students felt that practical training to care for children with difficulties is insufficient, while 35% highlighted the lack of emphasis on inclusive strategies. These figures reflect a need to improve educational programs to better address classroom demands.

65% of students indicated that they do not feel prepared to implement inclusive activities in Physical Education, which underscores the importance of offering practical experiences during initial training. In addition, the country analysis showed that English students reported greater exposure to inclusive workshops and practices (71%) compared to their Spanish peers (48%)

The statistical analysis revealed significant differences in the perception of training in both countries. English students reported greater satisfaction with their training compared to their Spanish peers, which could be attributed to more inclusive pedagogical approaches implemented in Portugal.

The results reflect a critical gap in teacher training to serve students with learning difficulties. Despite the growing demand for inclusive strategies, many educational programs do not provide the practical tools needed to meet this challenge.

One solution could be the integration of specific modules on attention to diversity in the Bachelor's Degree programs in Physical Education. In addition, collaboration with specialists in special educational needs could enrich the training of future teachers.

5. Conclusions

The analysis carried out allows the following conclusions to be drawn, supported by previous research:

The results confirm that physical activities not only improve motor development, but also the cognitive and social capacity of students with learning difficulties. As Lomas and Clemente (2017) have pointed out, properly designed physical activity programs can mitigate symptoms of attention deficit hyperactivity by increasing levels of concentration and self-control.

Teacher training must be a priority in the absence of training in special educational needs (SEN) continues to be a challenge in countries such as Spain. According to Díaz del Cueto (2009), the success of educational inclusion depends to a large extent on teacher training in inclusive strategies and adaptive practices. Our data coincide with this observation, highlighting that 65% of students of the Bachelor's Degree in Physical Education consider their preparation to attend to diversity inadequate.

Inclusion as a continuous process gives us the visibility of a diversity in the classroom that requires a personalized approach that addresses both individual needs and group dynamics. Rivas-Martínez and Bailey-Moreno (2019) argue that inclusion not only benefits students with difficulties, but also improves the learning environment for all students, fostering respect and empathy within the group. Therefore, designing specific physical exercise programs focused on improving self-regulation, social interaction and the development of cognitive skills in students with difficulties, would be necessary to incorporate mandatory modules on attention to diversity in the curricula of the Bachelor's Degrees in Physical Education, with emphasis on practical strategies; in turn, to promote collaborations between educational institutions and universities to enrich the practical experience of future teachers, as suggested by Velázquez (2015) and Miralles, Filella, and Lavega (2017).

These findings reinforce the need to combine efforts between educators, families, and policymakers to ensure inclusive and quality education, tailored to the needs of each student.

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