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MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH  
MOHAMED KHIDER UNIVERSITY, BISKRA  
FACULTY OF LETTERS AND LANGUAGES  
DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES



***The Effects of Mild Disabilities on  
the Performance of Middle School  
EFL Learners***

Dissertation submitted to the Department of Foreign Languages in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the "Master" degree in Language Sciences

Candidate:  
***Messaoud Rahmani***

Supervisor:  
***Mr. Mustapha Meddour***

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## **Abstract**

As an inquiry about one of the possible causes of discrepancy in EFL individual performance, the conducted study dedicates 5 chapters for that matter. Starting with the theoretical section, the devoted 3 chapters provides a review of some of the significant literature about, first, the FLL individual performance discrepancy theory, then, a conceptual delimitation to the term mild disability, and, finally, a comprehensive mentioning of the major symptoms and conditions each of the 3 categories of MD has. Set to gauge the validity of the research proposed hypothesis about mild disabilities being a possible contributor to some EFL learners' weak performance, the field-work section delivers through chapter 4 an accommodation about the methods and procedures followed, before beginning to report the findings attained from both questionnaires, I for students and II for teachers. The field-study involved a sample of 60 middle school second grade students and 6 EFL middle school teachers. After presenting a series of outcomes supporting earlier claims about the involvement of MDs in the low performance of some EFL learners, the study evolves into a last chapter, 5, that enlists a number of recommendations and teaching instructions to be followed in educating students with MDs.

### ***Résumé Français:***

Comme l'enquête sur l'une des causes possibles de l'écart en EFL performances individuelles, l'a mené l'étude consacre 5 chapitres pour ce sujet. à partir de la section théorique, le consacre 3 chapitres fournit un examen de certains des ouvrages d'importance, premièrement, la LFT chaque différence de performance théorie, ensuite, une délimitation conceptuelle pour le terme handicap doux, et, enfin, un complet mentionnant des principaux symptômes et conditions chacun des 3 catégories de MD a. Définir pour mesurer la validité de la recherche proposé hypothèse de handicaps légers un éventuel contributeur de certaines EFL les apprenants la faible performance, le travail sur le terrain section offre au chapitre 4 an accommodation about les méthodes et les procédures suivies, avant de commencer à faire rapport sur les résultats atteints dans les deux questionnaires, JE pour les étudiants et II pour les enseignants. L'étude portait sur un échantillon de 60 écoles intermédiaires deuxièmes année les étudiants et 6 EFL école intermédiaire enseignants. Après avoir présenté une série de résultats des revendications antérieures au sujet de la participation de MDS dans la faible performance de certaines EFL les apprenants, l'étude évolue dans un dernier chapitre, 5, qui incorpore un certain nombre de recommandations et d'enseignement les instructions à suivre pour l'éducation des élèves et étudiants avec MDs.

### ملخص الدراسة:

رغم التغيرات الجذرية التي شاهدها المنظومة التعليمية الجزائرية إلا أنه يلاحظ وجود ضعف في نتائج مادة اللغة الإنجليزية، أي أن الاعتقاد بأن تغيير المناهج التعليمية التي كانت متبعة سيؤدي بالضرورة إلى رفع أداء الطلبة؛ أثبت عدم نجاعته، لذا وجب البحث في العوامل الأخرى التي أدت إلى هذا الضعف في الأداء؛ ومن بينها ما يتعلق بالاختلاف في القدرات الفردية من حيث النمو الفكري والجاهزية الجسمانية، وهو ما تناوله هذه الدراسة من خلال التطرق إلى تلك الإعاقات التي يصعب تشخيصها من المظهر الخارجي للشخص أي الإعاقات الخفية؛ وتحتوي الدراسة على خمسة فصول؛ الثلاثة الأولى منها تتضمن خلفية نظرية لأهم المفاهيم المتعلقة بالمتغير المدروس، أما الفصل الرابع فيتطرق إلى النتائج المتحصل عليها من الدراسة الميدانية التي شملت 60 تلميذ و6 أساتذة تم استجوابهم عن طريق الاستبيان، بينما الفصل الخامس فشمّل اقتراحات وتوجيهات حول التعامل مع مثل هذه الحالات من الإعاقات الصعبة التشخيص.

## *Dedication*

*To my two shining Stars, Merriam and Maram*

*To my family,*

*Father, mother, sisters, and to my favorite young brother,*

*Thank you for all the unconditioned support that you have always  
given me*

*To those who have been there for me in better or worse*

*Father thank you for having patience and faith in me*

*Mother, I think I'd never be able to repay all the goodness and*

*Sister, Hanan, thank you for everything*

*Sister, Sana, thank you for being so patient*

*Imad, live better and dream more, have a better future.*

*Apologies, I couldn't do better*

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**List of Abbreviations**

**AAIDD:** American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

**ADHD:** Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder

**ADHD:** Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

**APD:** Auditory Processing Disorder

**AS:** Asperger's Syndrome

**ASD:** Autism Spectrum Disorder

**BD:** Behavior Disturbance

**CBA:** Competency Based Approach.

**CD:** Conduct Disorder

**CDC:** American Center of disease Control and prevention

**DISTAR:** Direct Instruction System for Teaching Arithmetic and Reading,

**ED:** Emotional Disturbance

**EFL:** English as a Foreign Language

**EFL:** English as Foreign Language learning

**EOD:** Early Onset Depression

**FL:** Foreign Language

**GMT:** Grammar Translation Method

**IDEA:** Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

**IQ:** Intelligence Quantum

**L1:** First Language

**L2:** Second Language

**LDA:** American Learning Disabilities Association

**MD:** Mild Disability or Disorder

**MID:** Mild Intellectual Disability

## **The Effects of Mild Disabilities**

**ML:** Mother tongue Language

**N#:** Number of responses

**NAMI:** National Alliance on Mental Illness

**NAS:** National Agency for Statistics.

**NCES:** National Center for Education Statistics

**NCLD:** National Center for Learning Disabilities

**NCLD:** National Center for Learning Disabilities

**NIDCD:** National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders

**NIMH:** National institute of mental health

**NIMH:** National institution of Mental Health

**NL:** Native Language

**NLD:** Nonverbal Learning Disabilities

**ODD:** Opposition Defiant Disorder

**PDRA:** The People's Democratic Republic of Algeria

**SNs:** Special Needs

**SpLD:** Specific Learning Disability

**TEFL:** Teaching English as a Foreign Language

**USA:** United States of America

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# *General Introduction*

## **General Introduction**

### **1. Definition and Identification of the topic**

Even though the Algerian educational system has in recent years experienced a series of radical reformations, English as foreign language (EFL) classes are still suffering from high levels of students' poor achievement. Ergo, students' weak performance can no longer be justified as the aftermath of a mere "mal-instruction". It is essential to apprehend the fact that the remaining plausible explanations for this phenomenon are environmental, *interpersonal*, or *intrapersonal*. However, the conducted study was set to maintain a psycho-pedagogical vantage point, and thus the scope of focus has been narrowed to tackle the possible effects Mild Disabilities (MDs) may impose on teaching and learning foreign languages, English in particular. The main reason for opting to have an inquiry about mild disabilities is their concealable nature that makes them virtually undetectable for an untrained eye such the case for most of the teachers. Henley, Ramsey, and Algozzine describe mild disabilities and students suffering from these sorts of deficits as follows: *"Mild disabilities usually are unrecognizable before entering and after exiting school. The physical appearance of these students is like that of students without disabilities."*(2009, p. 47)

In light of the 2010 census, the National Agency for Statistics has announced that there are over 2 million individuals with disabilities (motor and cognitive), and about a 20 percent of them are between the ages of 5 and 20 ("Algeria count two million disabled," 2011). The issued figures did not contain any mentioning of the current status of mild disabilities; mostly, because there is no official recognition of this psycho-pedagogical phenomenon as a valid categorical disability. For instance, the 34<sup>th</sup> issue of the Official Journal of the Republic of Algeria published a number of general regulations for characterizing individuals with special needs, provision of the governmental support to the special needs population, and; also, a statement of the civil rights (education, employment, social aid, medical aid...), but in section 1, where a precise briefing of the features and subgroups of special needs is required, there are no definite guidelines for designating disabilities other than implicit physical impairment or severe brain damage

(“protecting and developing individuals with disabilities”, 2002). Consequently, students with mild disabilities will be denied the opportunity of receiving special education that could help them cope with their peers. If we consider figures issued by the US department of Education; over 9 percent of the school population has been diagnosed with a mild disability (Henley, Ramsey, & Algozzine, 2009, p. 47), we can only estimate even higher percentage in our system because of the gap between both economies and educational systems. These facts can only pose the question of how grave a problem our students might be facing on the ground.

### 2. Research Problem

According to the aforementioned facts, the sole remediation of instruction materials has proven insufficient because of the unresolved issues of unsatisfactory outcomes of students' overall performance in English as foreign language classes. Therefore, further explanations are required to determine what other causes might be affecting the pedagogical efficiency of the EFL instructions. All remaining plausible explanations are characterized of having a psycho-environmental nature. Nonetheless, the study in question is mainly seeking to unravel the mystery about the following concerns:

- Is some students' weak performance in EFL classes a mere side effect to them having undiagnosed mild disability?
- Are EFL teachers prepared to efficiently manage such sort of situations where some of their students are suffering from any mild psychological deficits?
- What sort of impact can both the social and pedagogical milieu have on diagnosing and remedying students' mild disabilities?
- What sort of psycho-pedagogical assistance/support is available for teachers and students?

### 3. Background Information

Given the long history of special education, since the foundation of “*l’Institut National des Jeunes Aveugles*” in Paris, 1784, it is inevitable to have a wide range of theories and approaches about instructing, designating, and remedying both motor and cognitive impairments. However, mild disabilities were not spotlighted until

## General Introduction

the twentieth century, with the emergence of Alfred Thomas Binet's intelligence test (currently known as the IQ (Intelligence Quotient) test) in 1906, and Jean Piaget's theory of Cognitive Development, hence making it possible to gauge individuals cognitive maturation as well as retardation. Ergo, the severity of intellectual disabilities was labeled accordingly into severe, moderate, and mild (IDEA, 2006. Sec.300.8). In addition to the aforementioned intellectual disabilities, The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (1989) recognizes two more categories of mild disability that are behavioral disturbance and specific learning disabilities. According to the American Mental Health Administration, children with mental disturbances exhibit behaviors that are beyond mischief and rebellion, "With behavior disorders, your child or teen has a pattern of hostile, aggressive or disruptive behaviors for more than 6 months" (Behavior Disorder/emotional disturbance). Nevertheless, another manifestation of mild disabilities is purely restricted to the academic setting, and this last group of disabilities is distinguished as *specific learning disability (SpLD)*. Setting definite parameters for this particular impairment has proven futile, simply, because a learning disability is merely an exhibition of the aforementioned disabilities in educational circumstances. Specific learning disabilities is characterized by IDEA (1977) as the state in which "children who have a disorder in one or more of the basic cognitive process utilized in understanding or using language, spoken or written, which disorder may manifest in imperfect ability to listen, think, read, speak, spell, or to do mathematical calculations" (as quoted in Reid & Lienemann, 2006, p. 3). Although, the term compiles some deficits such as perceptual handicaps, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia, it is not to be confused with such conditions as "visual, hearing, motor impairments, emotional disturbance, or mental retardation" (Reid & Lienemann, 2006, p. 3).

Several studies were conducted regarding the effects of Mild disabilities on students' ability to learn foreign languages (e.g. Arries, 1999; Sparks & Ganschow, 1993; 1995; 1996). For instance, J.F. Arries published, in 1999, a study entitled "Learning Disabilities and Language Learning: A Curriculum Approach to the Design of Inclusive Courses", which highlights the impediments students with learning disabilities encounter while attempting to fulfill universities prerequisite for passing at least one FL course. Arries argues that the source of this difficulty is the fact that students with LDs are

obliged to take these classes in a traditional fashion, rather than having specialized programs adopted enough to meet their special needs. After interviewing a number of students with LDs, Arries was able to propose a special syllabus for assisting this sort of students coping with their fellow students who have no LDs. Furthermore in their published paper “The Impact of Native Language Learning Problems on Foreign Language Learning: Case Study illustrations of the Linguistic Coding Deficit Hypothesis”, Richard L. Sparks and Leonore Ganschow, in 1995 and 1996, questioned about the inadequacy of the former theories attempting to explain the reason for some learners underachievement in foreign language classes (such as lack of motivation, anxiety, mismatching styles, inefficient learning strategies...). Ergo, they argued that, in addition to those previous illustrations, there is an additional plausible explanation that resides in some students’ inability to properly learn their native language. As an example of language learning disabilities, Sparks and Ganschow opt to study the effects of what is known as Linguistic Coding Deficit Hypothesis (LCDH). However, the study has been conducted in an environment where there is no official recognition of any of mild disabilities, nor an inclusive educational program that comprises special class managed by paraeducators. In other word, this investigation is a situational study dedicated for exposing the facts surrounding the effects of Mild disabilities on learning second language in the Algerian educational system, if there is any.

#### **4. Statement of the Purpose**

The underlined goals of this quantitative study can be divided into two sections. First, the inquiry is set to uncover the true gravity of the situation where our educational system is devoting little effort to diagnose and provide students with mild disabilities the special treatment; they desperately necessitate. Moreover, the second goal involves the presentation of a variety of MDs teaching techniques that have the potentials for being an applicable remediation, and that is according to their accessibility to the teacher, for the sake of minimizing the impediments such disabilities might impose on the pedagogical evolvement of the students, and assisting them to achieve their potential. However, the ultimate purpose for the inquiry is to raise official awareness of the obstacles that this category of learners, nay citizens, are constantly encountering, thus extracting an official

recognition of their misfortune. In other words, issuing a set of regulations that fully defines the characteristics and classifications of these disorders; because according to the official Journal, the Algerian constitution does not specify the different categories of special needs, rather it gives a global terming of the distinguish between motor and mental disabilities (2002, p. 7). In contrast, the American constitutional system issued a series of regulations, in what is known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 1990), which contains a full coverage of the governing laws and classifications of this category.

### 5. Research Hypotheses

According to the possible outcomes of the study, the following hypotheses are derived:

- Mild disabilities are the *raison d'être* for some students' weak performance in English as foreign language learning classes.
- Mild disabilities do not have any effects on the students' performance in English as foreign language learning classes.

### 6. Dependent and independent variables:

For better understanding of the implications in the above stated hypotheses, it is a necessity, identifying both dependent and independent variables. First of all, the dependent variable in this study is the *individual performance in learning English as foreign language*. However, given the limitations of time and abilities, the quality of the academic achievement will be the primary criterion for evaluating the performance of students in learning English as foreign language. On the other end of the equation, mild disabilities resemble the independent variable, which the study is set to inquiry about the nature of effects mild disabilities have on the performance of students learning English as foreign language. Mild disabilities is a general term that describes moderate disabilities that visually unapparent, and their detection is most possible in school environment, where children are required to use their intellectual abilities the most. The term mild disability can actually refer to either one of three categorical disabilities, namely, mild intellectual disabilities (MID), emotional disturbance (ED), or specific learning

disabilities (SpLD). Therefore, the study is set to investigate the effects caused by any of the three on the performance of English as foreign language learners.

### 7. Data Gathering Tools

Given the investigative nature of the study, a field-work is most certainly required, and it included a carefully performed scrutiny for gathering and extracting data from the field with the utmost accuracy. This aspect of the research, i.e., field-work, encompassed the following data gathering tools:

- **Questionnaires:** This data-gathering tool in particular is widely utilized in social sciences due to the troublesomeness of having a census. This form of data-collection stresses the cruciality of having a well formed set of questions that are accessible for the intended respondents. Also, the lay-out of the questionnaire is to be eligible, nay appealing. The research in hand has accumulated answers from both teachers and students, thus each version had to have its level of complexity, technicality, and lay-out language (Arabic for pupils and English for EFL middle school instructors).
- **Aptitude Test:** Given the nature and objectives of the research, it is a prerequisite to gauge learners' potentials and brains plasticity for actually learning English as a foreign language. The test compiled two main exercises with 8 questions in the students' native language, thus Arabic. *The mini aptitude test* had to be administered in a relatively short time period, less than ten minutes because teachers have imposed some preconditions for allowing such practice that might result of some inconvenience to their ongoing course of teaching. However, with the limited number of questions used and their simple nature, the very most of students were able to complete the test.

### 8. Population and sampling

The study is designed to maintain a narrow scope of investigation that exclusively regards Middle-school EFL learners as its targeted population; namely, all Middle-school students of the Wilaya of M'sila. However, for considerations of time, effort, and accessibility of information, the inquiry has examined a mere portion of the population that is 60 middle school second graders from two of Berhoum's four Middle-schools (Salhi Abdelazize and Eastern Entrance middle schools, class 2M5 and class 2M1,

respectively), and this sort of procedure is often called convenience sampling. There are several reasons for selecting this sampling, and they can be enlisted as follows:

- ❖ Middle-school represents the first educational phase in which youngsters are exposed to EFL for the first time, and since students with MDs are estimated to have stronger tendency to drop out of school, particularly when there is no proper aid. Therefore, Middle-schools have the most suitable environment for observing the effect of MDs on learning English as a foreign language.
- ❖ The novelty of EFL to middle-school first graders course can interfere with the accuracy of any designation made about the phenomenon, raising questions about whether the source of the problem is the difficulty of the course itself or a psychological deficit.
- ❖ Since Middle school second graders can be more comfortable learning EFL, basing this study's results on this sample will most probably deliver a greater data-precision.

### **9. Benefits and Limitations of the Study**

Despite the fact that Mild Disabilities are not an exclusive source of concern to foreign language learning, the proposed study was set to sustain a narrow scope, not exceeding the mere inspection over the effects of this phenomenon on the scale of middle-school learners of English as foreign language, since conducting an extensive study would prerequisite a massive amount of time and effort. Nonetheless, this research can never guaranty that the results of this work would apply on other instructional situations, nor deny them. Furthermore, the only concern for the conducted study is to portray an approximate account of the actual impacts of MDs on learning English language among middle school second graders. It is to be reckoned that the integrity of the potentially collected-data is controlled by a number of variables such as the cooperation of the responsible authorities and the sensitivity of the subject which can be perceived differently according to the persona of the respondent.

# ***Chapter 1: Discrepancy in the Individual Performance of Foreign Language Learning***

## **1.1 Motivation and Second language Learning**

**1.1.1 Summary of the chief motivation theories in educational psychology**

**1.1.2 Historical development of FLL motivation theories**

**1.1.3 A review of some major models of motivation and FL learning**

## **1.2 Language Aptitude, Personality, and Second Language Learning**

**1.2.1 Language Aptitude and Foreign Language Learning**

**1.2.2 Personality and Second Language Learning**

# ***1 Discrepancy in the Individual Performance of Foreign Language Learning***

## ***Introduction***

Unlike the traditional teaching approaches, namely those of behaviorism that considered learners as empty vassals or hosts for they implant their input, recent teaching philosophies are promoting for an alteration to a more socio-psychological set of instructional behaviors. Subsequently, most of the FL teaching models that excluded any views concerning the inner status of the learner, due to the abstractness of it, have proven ineffective because of the failures they had in ensuring *consistency* on the level of students foreign language learning behavior, thus such methods were abandoned in favor of ones that devote far greater consideration toward the individual psych-social attributes because, after all, even picturing humans as computers processing data can imply diversity in performance for that computers may vary in their properties.

Most models of FLL such as that of Gardner's socio-educational model have accentuated four chief individual differences, *intelligence, language aptitude, motivation, and anxiety* (Gardner, 1982, p. 18). It is this sort of *individualities* that determine the quality of the attained foreign language behavior. The following chapter will negotiate some of the existing works on the characteristics and the effects of such individual attributes on one's performance in learning foreign languages. Ergo, the study will be limited to demonstrating some of the effects imposed, first, by the nature of attitudes and motivation the learner has toward the FL community, as well as, the actual process of learning the language. Moreover, the individual's attributes, represented via the language learning aptitude and personality of the learner, are believed to have a significant influence on the outcome of the foreign language learning process.

### 1.1 *Motivation and Second language Learning*

The word *motivation* is derived from the Latin term *motivus*, which could simply refer to *a cause to move*, or the sensation for doing a certain activity (Oxford Latin Dictionary, 1968, p. 1173). Nevertheless, educational psychologists tend to define motivation as the inner “*energization*” that drives individuals to perform certain behaviors, and such *inner encouragement* is initiated from the overwhelming desire to achieve one’s goals and objective, such is the case for learning a foreign language (Salkind, 2008, p. 687).

Moreover, Zoltan Dornyei, at the entry of his book “motivational strategies in the language classroom”, questions if there is such *thing* that resembles motivation, and his evident answer was negative, simply, because he argues that motivation is a mere concept set to refer to the positive *attitudes* an individual may exhibit during a certain activity, such is learning (2001, p. 5). It is such theoretical nature of motivation that has left scholars reluctant to approach such matter, leaving it for educational psychologists who, starting from the premise that motivation; as well as *interest* (or *attitude*), is an integrative entity of students personality that is involved in virtually every aspect of their cognitive processes. Educational psychologists dedicate a great degree of interest toward the study of the nature of motivation and controlling factors, since they believe that within it lay all the answers to explaining and foretelling the behaviors that students would ensue, and that was reflected via the constant association of motivation with both the academic success and failure of learners. (Dornyei, 2001, p. 5)

Even though educational psychologists tend to associate motivation with the own psychology of the learner, both Gardner and Lambert (1970) argue that learning a foreign language, unlike other instructional subjects, is heavily influenced by various socio-cultural factors such as the *attitudes students develop (if not already possessed)* towards *the foreign language* due to the *cultural stereotypes and geopolitical considerations* learners have (p. 68). On a similar ground, Marion Williams (1994) described the relationship between motivation and language learning:

There is no question that learning a foreign language is different to learning other subjects. This is mainly because of the social nature of such a venture. Language, after

all, belongs to a person's whole social being: it is part of one's identity, and is used to convey this identity to other people. The learning of a foreign language involves far more than simply learning skills, or a system of rules, or a grammar; it involves an alteration in self-image, the adoption of new social and cultural behaviors and ways of being, and therefore has a significant impact on the social nature of the learner. (p. 77) (as quoted in Dornyei, 2005, p. 68)

### **1.1.1 Summary of the chief motivation theories in educational psychology:**

In his book "*Motivational Strategies in the Language Classroom*", Zoltan Dornyei (2001) compiles a list of ten theories as a reference to the most influential and amenable theories of motivation in the realm of educational psychology (p. 10). Given the obscurity of the concept of motivation, particularly its mechanism, each theory presents an explanation to what is believed to be a controlling factor in the nature of the *driving desire* individuals have about doing certain activities (i.e., motivation).

#### **1.1.1.1 Expectancy-value theories:**

The works of Brophy (1999), Eccles and Wigfield (1995) have set tone to what become considered as one of the most influential motivational theories in educational psychology. The theory was mainly developed about two *motivational components* that is *expectancy of success and the value attached to it (success) on task*. In other words, the motivation to undergo certain "tasks" is a mere "product" of the expectancy the learner build for his own success and degree of significance or *value* he/she attaches to learning. Hence, it is argued that the higher expectations of success and the higher value tagged to the activity (e.g. foreign language learning) are, the higher degree of the learner's positive motivation will be. (Dornyei, 2001, p. 57- 58)

#### **1.1.1.2 Achievement motivation theory:**

In their book "*Motivation and Achievement*", Atkinson and Raynor (1974) suggested that the nature of the motivational force, learners would be exposed to, is determined by mainly two factors (positive and negative). The first set of factors is initiated by the *positive influences* manifested through first the *expectancy* (or the perceived probability) of *success*, the incentive *value of successful task fulfillment*, and the *need for achievement*. On the other hand, the second set of *incentive factors* takes a

shape of negativity mainly in the form of *fear of failure*, the urge to avoid failure and the *probability* of it.

### **1.1.1.3 Self-efficacy theory:**

According to A. Bandura (1997), individuals have a certain *pre-judgment* about their capabilities to fulfill certain tasks, and they will thusly elect what tasks to approach, as well as, the *amount* of *effort* devoted and *persistence displayed*. This measure of one's probability of success is referred to as *self-efficacy*. (Self-efficacy: the exercise of control)

### **1.1.1.4 Attribution theory:**

B. Weiner (1992) claimed that learners' tendency to ascribe, or *attribute*, the causes of their previous successes and failures is set to interfere with the *motivation to initiate* future tasks (such as learning). Furthermore, the premise that ability and effort are what determines the quality of the educational outcome a learner exhibit. Hence, learners may deem future tasks to failure, simply because of the *attributions* based on similar task resulted of failure. Consequently, he/she will devote little effort to accomplish what is believed to be a futile attempt for success. (Weiner, p. 1992)

### **1.1.1.5 Self-worth theory:**

M. V Covington (1998) strongly believed that learners' *perceived self-worth* plays a major role in the level of motivation surrounding the learning process because individuals are constantly seeking to preserve and improve their *personal value (or face) and worth*. Such scenario is believed to have the very same effects in the educational setting, and that what has been recorded the unique patterns of behavior learners tend to demonstrate, in their pursuit to *sustain* their *worth* within the *school milieu*. Such attitude can only raise learners' motivation to enhance, or at least maintain, their school image by positively engaging in the school activities. However, some learners may develop some negative sense of *self-worth*, resulting of lack of interest and care toward any school related activity. (Covington, 1998, p. 108)

### 1.1.1.6 Goal setting theory

Starting from the fact that humans are goal driven creatures, in the sense that each action has a certain purpose, E.A Locke and G.P Latham (1990) stated that goals are *self-initiated*. Being characterized by both *specificity* and *difficulty*, goals can function as a motivation for individuals to employ a high level of effort into the activities they are being engaged in, such as learning a foreign language. (p. 50)

### 1.1.1.7 Goal orientation theory:

In the *Educational Psychology Journal*, Ames (1992) labeled learning goals, according to the *nature* of *outcome* learners are seeking, into *mastery* and *performance* goals. The first is defined as the sort of goals in which learners concentrate on learning the *content* and *mastering* it, unlike the latter which expresses a greater *interest* in developing the required skills to *excel* at school, and that by *enhancing* their overall *performance*, so it can serve that end well. Furthermore, Ames argues that mastery goals generates more motivating attitudes than those generated by performance goals, simply, because learners with the need to master the input has a wider scope that requisites an extensive knowledge and effort, which reflects a positive attitude towards learning. On the other hand, *performance-motivated* learners will limit their leaning activities into those required for collecting good marks.

### 1.1.1.8 Self-determination theory:

Deci, Ryan (1985), and Vallerand (1997), all three, amended the distinction that motivation, according to the nature of the goals associated to, is either *intrinsic* or *extrinsic*. Intrinsic motivation is described by E. L. Deci and R. M. Ryan (1985) as being concerned with behaviors that performed to build a sense of *self-satisfaction* through the fulfillment of one's objectives (e.g. learning foreign languages for the affection of it). In other words, the individual inspires *joy* out of being merely engaged in the particular activity. Differently, *extrinsic motivation* is considered as being rather pragmatic in that prospect because behaviors are performed for the sole purpose of fulfilling the individual's end (e.g. attaining good marks). Furthermore, Vallerand (1997) believed that *human motives* be labeled into either *self-determined (intrinsic)* or *controlled (extrinsic)* forms of motivation.

### **1.1.1.9 Social-Motivation Theory:**

Despite the unanimous view about motivation as being *auto-energizing* cognitive factor, Weiner (1992) and Wentzel (1999), both, believe that environment can carry a significant role in defining the nature of *attitudes*, the individual will have towards the performance of certain behavior, such as the case with learning foreign languages where learners' motivation to learn the language will be *influenced* by their views and attitudes towards the language itself, or its community.

### **1.1.1.10 Theory of planned behavior:**

In his book *Attitudes, Personality, and behavior*, Ajzen (2008) has associated three aspects; *attitudes*, *subjective norms*, and *perceived behavioral control*, with the nature of motivation individuals develop about engaging certain activities (Dornyei, 2001, p. 50). Eagly and Chaiken (1993) define the aforementioned concepts as follows; *an attitude* is an emotional sense that applies a *directive* influence on behavior, since the people's attitudes or *feelings* towards a certain target (e.g. learning a foreign language as a target) can easily effect the individual's judgment towards the underlined educational target. However, the starting point for growing an attitude roots in the *subjective norms* or perceived social pressures that shapes them and the *perceived behavioral control*, or the perceived ease or difficulty of performing the behavior, through which the individual will try reasonably build his expectations accordingly. (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993, p. 23)

### **1.1.2 Historical development of FLL motivation theories:**

Before start talking about the works that has been done in the field of motivation and foreign language learning, one must portray a clear picture of the historical background and the developmental stages that the research of motivation in second language learning experienced. Zoltan Dornyei (2005) recognizes three major stages:

- a) ***The social psychological period (1959-1990):*** characterized by the work of *R. C. Gardner* and his students along with some associates in Canada
- b) ***The cognitive-suited period (during the 1990s):*** characterized by a series of works that was harmonized with the cognitive theories in educational psychology.

c) *The process-oriented period (the last ten years):* characterized in the special interest in the motivational change individuals experience, during performing a variety of activities. It is the works of Dornyei, Ushioda, and their colleagues in Europe that established this trend in the study of motivation in second language learning. (Dornyei, 2005, p. 66)

### **1.1.3 A review of some major models of motivation and FL learning**

#### **1.1.3.1 Gardner's socio-educational model:**

Given the fact that Gardner's work represents a milestone in the study of motivation in educational psychology, the focus will be confined within his model which provides a fairly clearly illustration to what relation there is between motivation and foreign language learning.

Starting from their strong belief that language learning is deeply a *social event*, *Robert Gardner, Wallace Lambert, and Richard Clément* argued that learning a foreign language is heavily influenced by the *attitudes and social views* individual learners have towards the foreign language and its community (Gardner, 1985, p. 10). However, the fact that some learners prevail acquiring a "*despised*" foreign language urged Gardner to clear the distinction between two broad categories of learners' goals:

- ***Integrative orientation***, in this case scenario, the learner exhibits a clear positive attitude, or even affection, toward the foreign language community. This sense of admiration is what drives the learner to absolutely do whatever he/she can to become considered an integral member of such community.
- ***Instrumental orientation***, it is when learning a foreign language merely serves as a tool to assist the learner attain a certain pragmatic gain, such as the case with learning a foreign language as job or school requirement. (Dornyei, 2005, p. 16)

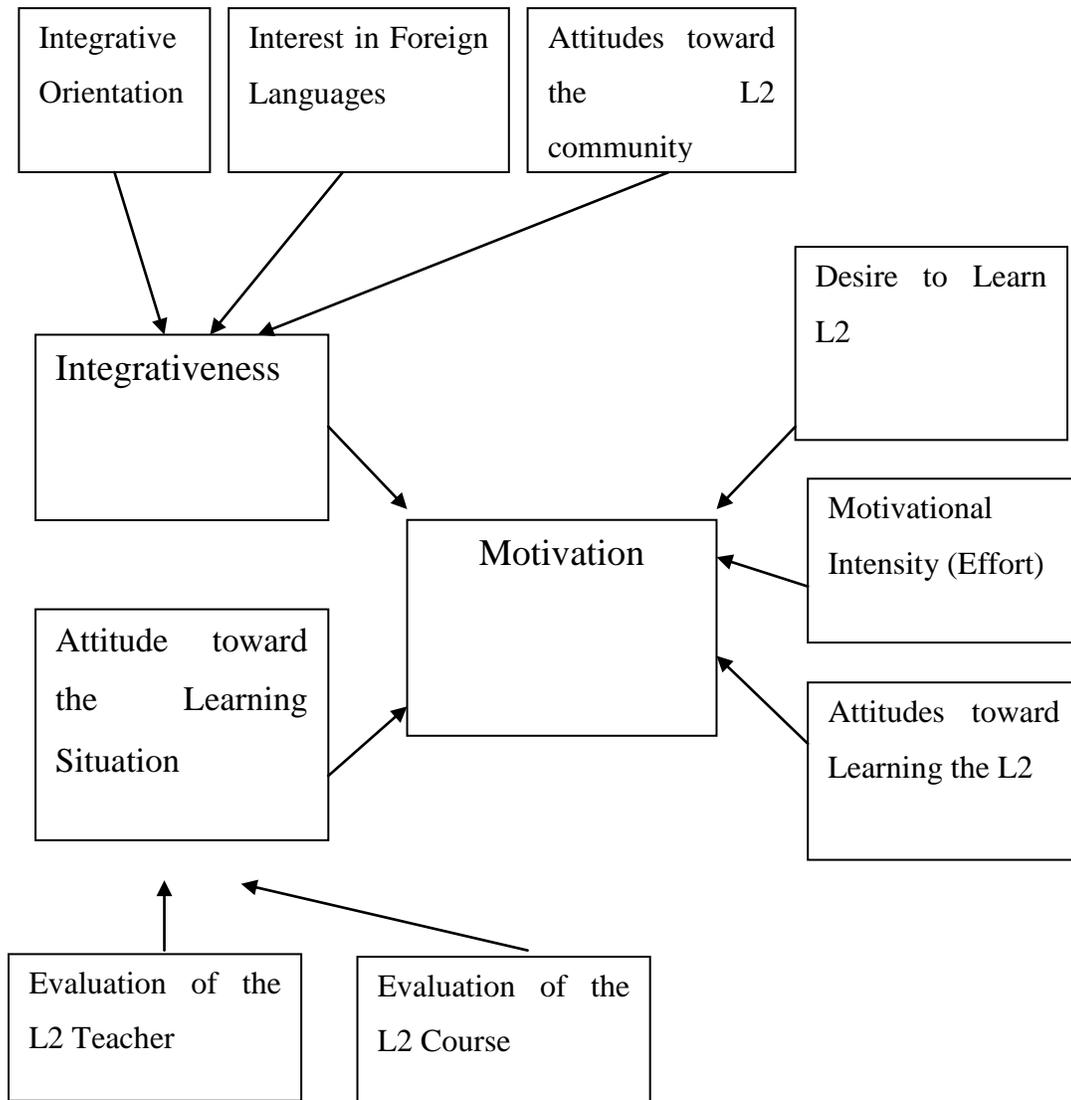
Even though both of these orientations have been widely recognized in the field of foreign language learning, a greater emphasis and effort have been dedicated to studying the integrative aspect of motivation, in what was later introduced as the

“*integrative motive*”. According to Gardner (1985), an integrative motive is combined of three major components:

- ***Integrativeness***, which incorporates integrative orientation, interest in foreign languages, and the attitudes towards the L2 community, which might demonstrates the individual’s keenness to socialize with the L2 group.
- ***Attitudes toward the learning situation***, this component discusses the effects the learner’s feelings and attitudes toward the FL teacher and the FL course itself can have on the progress of the FL learning.
- ***Motivation***, in which Gardner specifies three major constituents, that is the motivational intensity, desire to learn, and attitudes towards learning the language.

Nonetheless, Richard Clément has suggested that *linguistic self-confidence*, what was considered a valuable addition by Dornyei, is to be enfolded as a *motivational subsystem*.

**FIG 1.1:** Schematic Representation of Gardner's (1985) Conceptualization of the integrative motive



**Source:** compiled from Gardner (1985) and Dornyei (2005)

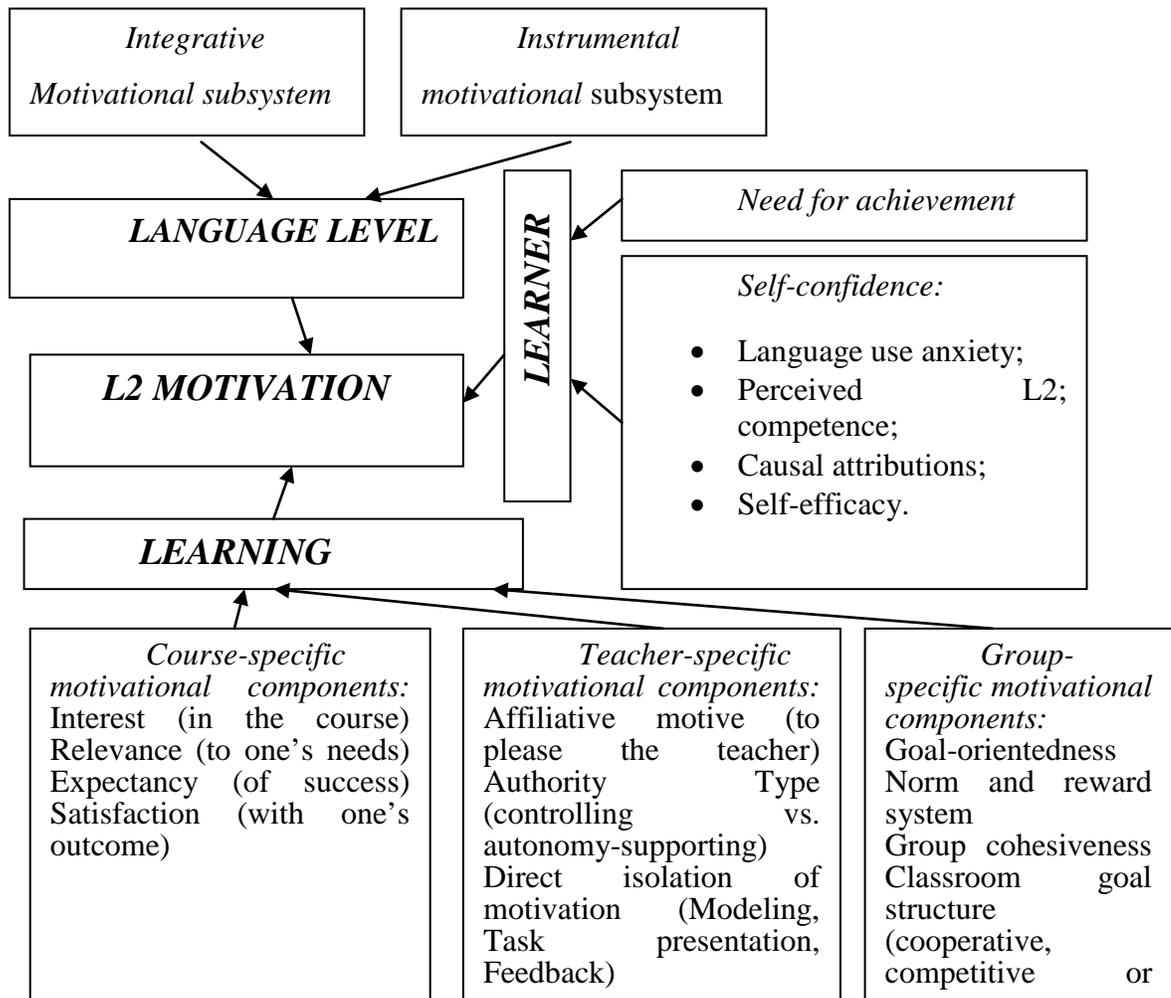
**1.1.3.2 Dornyei's framework of L2 motivation:**

Despite the huge approval that Gardner's works received, Dornyei (1994), Williams, and Burden (1997) suggested that there has been a great gap between the *Gardnerian* motivational theories in educational psychology and their counterparts in the field of TFL. The reason for such premise is that *over-focusing* on the social aspects of the nature of motivation has left many other vital aspects neglected and overlooked. As a result, Zoltan Dornyei (2005) proposed what he believed to be a more elaborate

framework that may provide more practical insights of how motivation interferes with the course of learning a foreign language.

In his frame work of L2 motivation, Dornyei has proposed three chief levels of motivation, the language, the learner, and the learning situational level, all three involved in the process of shaping up the learner’s attitudes toward performing the activity of learning the FL.

**Figure 1.2:** *Dornyei’s (1994) framework of L2 motivation*



*Source:* Compiled from Zoltan Dornyei’s book, *Motivational strategies in the Language Classroom*, (2001)

**1.1.3.3 Williams and Burden’s framework of L2 motivation:**

Following the footsteps of Dornyei, Williams and Burden were able to initiate a rather similar notion of the *complexity* that L2 motivation has as a nature, as well as the notion of the *multi-dimensionality* in structure. Nonetheless, such agreement was interrupted by the different grouping standards (Dornyei’s levels of influence) of the proposed motivation components, instead depending on determining the orientation of the motivational influence through limiting the probabilities into *internal* and *external*. The work of Williams and Burden (1997) on internal and external motivational influences has been effectively summarized by Zoltan Dornyei and projected through the following grid. (Dornyei, 2005, p. 20)

**Table 1.1:** Williams and Burden’s (1997) framework of L2 motivation

<b><i>L2 Motivation</i></b>	
<b><i>Internal Factors</i></b>	<b><i>External Factors</i></b>
<p><i>Intrinsic interest of activity:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arousal of Curiosity;</li> <li>• Optimal degree of challenge.</li> </ul> <p><i>Perceived value of activity:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal relevance;</li> <li>• Anticipated value of outcomes</li> <li>• Intrinsic value attributed to the activity.</li> </ul> <p><i>Sense of agency:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Locus of causality;</li> <li>• Locus of control re-process and outcome.</li> <li>• Ability to appropriate goals.</li> </ul> <p><i>Mastery:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feelings of competence;</li> <li>• Awareness of developing skills</li> </ul>	<p><i>Significant others:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents;</li> <li>• Teachers;</li> <li>• Peers.</li> </ul> <p><i>The nature of interaction with significant others:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mediated learning experiences;</li> <li>• The nature and amount of feedback</li> <li>• Rewards</li> <li>• The nature and amount of appropriate praise;</li> <li>• Punishments, sanctions.</li> </ul> <p><i>The learning environment:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comfort;</li> <li>• Resources;</li> </ul>

<p>and mastery in a chosen area;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-efficacy</li> </ul> <p><i>Self-concept:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Realistic awareness of personal strengths and weaknesses in skills required.</li> <li>• Personal definitions and judgments of success and failure;</li> <li>• Self-worth concern;</li> <li>• Learned helplessness.</li> </ul> <p><i>Attitudes:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To language learning in general;</li> <li>• To the target language;</li> <li>• To the target community and culture.</li> </ul> <p><i>Other affective states:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confidence;</li> <li>• Anxiety and fear</li> </ul> <p><i>Developmental age and stage.</i></p> <p><i>Gender.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time of day, week, year;</li> <li>• Size of class and school;</li> <li>• Class and school ethos</li> </ul> <p><i>The broader context:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wider family networks;</li> <li>• The local education system;</li> <li>• Conflicting interests;</li> <li>• Societal expectations and attitudes.</li> </ul>
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*Source:* Zoltan Dornyei’s book, *the Psychology of the Language Learner* (2005, p. 20)

### ***1.2 Language Aptitude, Personality, and Second Language Learning***

As a result to the constant inconsistencies that has been spotted in 2L language learners performance, a series of theories were presented forward as an plausible explanation to the undefined factors causing such *discrepancy*. Nonetheless, it is not all of those theories provided a fully comprehensive theoretical frame for such phenomenon. With the rise of psychology and psychological theories about the individual differences in terms of intelligence levels and personality, the introduction of the concepts language aptitude and personality in 2LL was made to provide a platform explanation to the

inconsistency in the FL students. Such premise was thoroughly scrutinized by the work of Naiman et al (1975), in which they surveyed some FL teachers about the qualities of their best students, and the possible causes for some lack of performance. (Gardner, 1985, p. 66)

### **1.2.1 Language Aptitude and Foreign Language Learning**

It has been aforementioned that the Naiman's study (1975) was mainly concerned with investigating the pattern most FL teachers tend to highlight when questioned about the qualities students excelling in FL possess. Some of the first works on gauging individuals chances of success as FL learners can be traced back to the works of Henmen (1929), focusing mainly on the concept of *intelligence*, which dominated the realm of educational psychology at the time. In other words, Henmen believed that individual's ability to learn and use a language is a relatively a gaugeable matter, and that by simply measuring the *language intelligence* a person has. The set of language aptitude tests are mainly targeted to measure the extent to the learners' knowledge and proficiency in their native language as well as their creativity, so determining their *aptitudes* to attaining a new linguistic system. This sort of proposition reflects a strong belief of the *genetic* nature the language has, in terms of associating the ability to absorb an alien language with the person's *genetic architecture*. (Gardner, 1985, p. 87)

The concept aptitude, in educational psychology, is defined as the "individual differences that are related to subsequent learning during a fixed timeframe" (Salkind, 2008, p. 47). Moreover, Charles Stansfield (1989) illustrates that *language learning aptitude* is rather a *process* of estimating the level of performance that an individual can demonstrate learning a foreign language, according to the given circumstances. With the rising awareness of the delicacy for determining individuals' *potential* to accumulate a new linguistic system, the need to produce efficiently accurate tests became immense.

#### **1.2.1.1 Language learning aptitude measurement:**

Gardner (1985) recognizes three major aptitude tests. First, The Modern Language Aptitude Test (MLAT) (Carroll and Sapon, 1959) is appropriate to students as young as grade nine (14 years old). The Language Aptitude Battery (Pimsleur, 1966) can be used beginning in high school (14 or 15 years of age). The Elementary Form of the

Modern Language Aptitude Test (Carroll and Sapon in 1967) was modified to suit students in grades three to six (eight to 11 years old). In general, the abilities tapped by this latter test are assumed to be similar to those tapped by the version for older students.

### **1.2.1.1.1 *The Modern Language Aptitude Test (MLAT):***

In 1974, Carrol promoted that language aptitude comprises four abilities, and this interpretation underlies measurement in those areas. *Phonetic coding* is considered the most important and is defined as the ability to both *code* and *assimilate* phonetic material and hold it for long periods of time in memory. *Grammatical sensitivity* is viewed as an awareness and appreciation of the functions of grammatical elements in one's own language. *Memory ability* refers to the capacity to remember large amounts of material, and, although it conceivably involves the use of some mnemonic system, this is not specified. *Inductive language learning ability* involves the ability to induce patterns of the language from the primary language data and is seen as conceptually similar to general reasoning.

The MLAT consists of five subtests, number learning, phonetic script, spelling clues, words in sentences, and paired associates. Testing time for the full battery is approximately 65 minutes, while the short form, the last three subtests, requires 40 minutes. The subtests of the MLAT were designed to tap the four abilities described above. In research leading to the development of the test, Carroll, 1958, conducted a series of tests administered to two different samples of Air Force personnel taking a one-week trial course in Mandarin Chinese. The tests were not identical for the two samples but did represent a broad spectrum of verbal ability tests in order to determine the nature of language aptitude. This study consequently helped to define the dimensions of language aptitude and to show which factors and tests were related to second language achievement. It was partly on the basis of this study as well as subsequent research that the above abilities (i.e. phonetic coding, grammatical sensitivity...) were identified as components of language aptitude. (Gardner, 2005, p. 78)

### **1.2.1.1.2 *The Language Aptitude Battery (LAB)***

The Language Aptitude Battery appears similar to the MLAT, in many respects. It consists of six sections, the first two depending simply on verbal report. Part one, grade

point average, requires that subjects report their most recent year-end grades in English, mathematics, science and history (or social science), and Part two, interest, is based on the students' self-ratings on a five-point scale of their interest in studying a foreign language. Part three consists of a vocabulary test. Part four is the language analysis test. In this test, subjects are presented with a list of words and phrases in Kabardian (a fictitious language) and their English equivalents. From these, subjects must deduce how to say other things in Kabardian and select the correct answer from alternatives provided. In Part five, sound discrimination, subjects are taught, by means of a tape recording, three similar-sounding words in a foreign language. They then hear sentences spoken in the language and must indicate which of the three words each sentence contains. Part six is the sound symbol test. Subjects hear a two or three-syllable nonsense word and must indicate which of four printed alternatives it was. (Gardner, 1985, p. 88)

### ***1.2.1.1.3 The Modern Language Aptitude Test-Elementary Form (EMLAT)***

The Modern Language Aptitude Test- Elementary Form (EMLAT) was developed for students in third to sixth grade, and consists of four subtests. These are very similar conceptually to subtests of the MLAT but the difficulty level is appropriate to younger children. The hidden words test requires that the children find a synonym for words that are presented in their booklets in a kind of phonetic spelling. This test is similar to the spelling clues test of the MLAT and presumably measures vocabulary knowledge and sound-symbol association ability. The matching words test is comparable to the words in sentences test of the MLAT in that two sentences are presented, and students must identify the word in a second sentence that has the same syntactic function as a particular word in the first sentence. In the finding rhymes test, the student must select a word which rhymes with a stimulus word. There is no comparable test in the MLAT, but it is assumed that this test measures sound discrimination, an ability tapped by the phonetic script test in the MLAT. The number learning test requires students to learn the names of numbers in an artificial language and then write down the number when they hear it in the new language. The assumed underlying abilities are memory and auditory alertness. (Gardner, 1985, p. 92)

### 1.2.2 Personality and Second Language Learning:

It is difficult to conceive of a comprehensive theoretical model linking personality attributes to second language achievement, though one can, of course, think of specific personality attributes which might be related to such achievement. Clearly, many teachers see associations between personality attributes and the successful acquisition of a second language. Robert Gardner found that teachers viewed successful students as *meticulous* (perfectionist), *mature*, *responsible*, *self-confident*, *extrovert* (bubbly, outgoing), *independent*, *passive*, *shy* and *introverted*. Unsuccessful students, on the other hand, were most frequently described as demonstrating a *lack of self-confidence* and as being *timid*, *shy*, *careless*, *afraid to express themselves* and *nervous*, yet it might be noted in passing that, in some instances, traits associated with both successful and unsuccessful students are similar (Gardner, 1985, p. 153). Rivers (1964) has identified similar personality features that correlate to second language achievement, but, rather than suggest a direct link with proficiency, Rivers implies that they will be mediated by motivation. She states (1964, p. 82) that:

*The previous history and the personality of the individual are important and must be taken into account in endeavouring to understand his motivation. Such highly personal motives as fear or anxiety, learned through past experience, may combine with learned social motives, such as desire for status in a group and for social approval, creating complex reactions which can work powerfully toward progress in a foreign language or toward inhibiting oral language responses.* (as quoted in Gardner p. 26)

Later on, Rivers (1964) clarifies that “because of the acquired motivation in our society to conform, he (i.e., the student) may prefer to tone down his accent and intonation to the average of the group” (p. 83). Such comments clearly suggest that achievement in a second language should be related to such personality attributes as anxiety, status seeking, need for approval, social conformity. To sum up, the aforementioned personality variables have a direct influence on the level and nature of motivation, FL learners develop, and accordingly, the individual level of achievement and performance in learning foreign languages is determined.

### ***Conclusion:***

With the ever growing sense of the vitality of acquiring foreign languages, the interest in designating the factors behind some individuals' lack of performance in foreign language learning has become greater than ever. According to Robert Gardner (1985), students' inability to achieve satisfactory outcomes in learning foreign languages is frequently classified by some universities and educational institutions as being a disability that requires proper attention (p. 10). Nonetheless, it is not all cases of underachievement a matter of a potential disability, given the case with the effects imposed by the motivation and personality of the learner. The ambiguity surrounding the true circumstances shaping the performance of the learner is further controlled by the special needs some students have, limiting their chances for a convenient FL acquisition outcome. These special needs are categorized according to their severity into three main categories: severe (usually apparent), moderate or mild. The latter is rather unique for being hard to detect, and that what made the decision for pursuing a study on the characteristics that enfold such deficits and how language teachers can possibly handle such delicate matter.

# ***Chapter 2: Mild Disabilities: An Overview***

## **2.1 What is a Mild Disability?**

**2.1.1 The Characteristic Categorization of Mild Disabilities**

**2.1.2 Cross categorical characteristics**

## **2.2 An overview of the instructional strategies for the mildly disabled students**

**2.2.1 Cognitive Aspects:**

**2.2.2 Academic Aspects**

**2.2.3 Language Aspects**

**2.2.4 Social Aspects**

## **2.3 Causes of Mild disabilities**

**2.3.1 Organic and Biological Causes**

**2.3.2 Environmental Causes**

## ***2 Mild Disabilities: An Overview***

### ***Introduction***

It was not before the second half of the twentieth century that official attention was signaled toward the less fortunate group of the physically and mentally disabled, particularly with the rise of psychiatry as a humanistic approach to this phenomenon. According to Henley, Ramsey, and Algozzine (2009), the American educational system itself followed a *pre-judgmental policy* toward learners with special needs, and that prior to the 1970's. In other words, students with special needs were blindly underestimated as being incapable of achieving a worth-while educational outcome, thus they were ill-treated as inferiors to the rest of society. Despite the early legislations that attempted to define the rights of this category, most of the proposed regulations failed to sustain a sense of objectivity and fairness toward their cause. Such treatment is yet witnessed in our society, denying a large portion of the population the opportunity to fulfill their true potential, more than half a million person under twenty of age has been diagnosed of a disability, either mental or motor ("Algeria Counts Two Million Disabled," 2011). Even though the Algerian constitution has set a number of laws that govern the fair treatment and supposedly ensures the wellbeing of the *handicapped*, this is how the individuals with special needs were labeled in the 2002, may, official journal (p. 7-12). Moreover, this set of regulations was fairly shallow, for that not having a practical description of the different categories and measures to be followed in each case.

During the early nineties, the individuals with special needs were closer than ever to the fulfillment of their quest of having an equal share of education, and that was the result of the American government issuing a set of regulations that provides a comprehensive description of the characteristics each category has, and this legislation

## **Mild Disabilities: An Overview**

was passed under the name “Individuals with Disabilities Education Act”<sup>1</sup> (or IDEA). According to IDEA, children with special needs are described:

*as having mental retardation, a hearing impairment (including deafness), a speech or language impairment, a visual impairment (including blindness), a serious emotional disturbance (referred to in this part as "emotional disturbance"), an orthopedic impairment, autism, traumatic brain injury, another health impairment, a specific learning disability, deaf-blindness, or multiple disabilities, and who, by reason thereof, needs special education and related services. (IDEA, 2006)*

Based on the provided definition, there can be three different levels of disability according to the severity of impairment: severe, moderate, and mild. Unlike the first two categories, which can be described as been *visual*; in the sense that most of the severe and moderate defects (both motor and mental) are manifested through the individual's exterior, the third category, or *mild disabilities*, is rather of a concealable nature, making them even harder to detect, particularly for an untrained eye, such the case for most of our teachers who have virtually no experience in psychology, not alone field of psychiatry used to diagnose and remedy this sort of disabilities. Furthermore, this raises plenty of questions about the genuine nature of this sort of disabilities, how to identify them, and how can a teacher react efficiently to such cases when confronted with.

### ***2.1 What is a Mild Disability?***

Mild disabilities (MD), or sometimes known as moderate disabilities, are rather a unique category of disability that was not officially recognized as an educational disability until the late eighties and the early nineties, with the legislation of the individuals with disabilities education act (IDEA, 1990). The uniqueness of this sort of disabilities has been expressed through the definition Henley, Ramsey, and Algozzine (2009) provided for mild disabilities; “students with mild disabilities are, in almost all

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<sup>1</sup>**Individuals with Disabilities Education Act** (IDEA) is a United States federal law that governs how states and public agencies provide early intervention, special education, and related services to children with disabilities. It addresses the educational needs of children with disabilities from birth to age 18 or 21 in cases that involve 14 specified categories of disability.

respects, physically normal children who have encountered learning problems "upon entering school]" (p. 47), since the term "mild" indicates; the same notion that is the concealable nature of the disability because the term mild originates from *mollis*; Latin for soft and tender, the opposite of severe (Oxford Latin Dictionary, 1968, p. 1828). Therefore, the educational setting is about the sole setting, where mild disabilities are manifested the most. Nonetheless, such assumption can only imply that schools ought to have an effective monitoring system for detecting these disorders, and such service can only be provided by an expert in educational psychology and didactics.

According to Patricia Burke (2008), these experts are rather known for a variety of names, paraeducators, paraprofessionals, learning assistance, and so many other names. Despite this nomenclature scenario, Burke argues that the major role of this aid is to provide psychological counseling, whenever needed (p. 17). However, for most teachers, such privilege is unfortunately unavailable, such as the case in our educational system, with the only paraeducational presence is that of the *directive counsel*. Ergo, teachers should try to build, at least, a basic knowledge about the typology and characteristics that mild disabilities have.

### ***2.1.1 The Characteristic Categorization of Mild Disabilities***

Even though, students with mild disabilities are hard to predict, and they exude, into certain extent, similar symptoms, and that what Ysseldyke and Algozzine (1982) expressed in their book, *Critical Issues in Special and Remedial Education*. Nonetheless, Algozzine came back along with Ramsey and Henley (2009) to compile a list of some of the most distinguishable characteristics that each category has. According to their classification there are three major types of mild disability, namely, intellectual mild disabilities, behavior disorders, and specific learning disabilities. The following grid will present a comprehensive overview of the features that teachers can consider, while attempting to diagnose the potential mild disability case they may confront with their students. However, this can never mean that teachers do not need further professional consultation because all they are expected to do is nothing more than a preliminary phase, which will subsequently require the involvement of parents who would help determining what further measure to be undertaken.

## Mild Disabilities: An Overview

**Table 2.1:** *Characteristic Categorization of Mild Disabilities*

	<i>Mild Intellectual Disability</i>	<i>Emotional Disturbance/ Behavioral Disorder</i>	<i>Specific Learning Disabilities</i>
<i>Cognitive</i>	Subaverage intellectually. Eligibility criteria: 2 SDs below the mean (i.e. 50-70 IQ score); often demonstrate short memory span, difficulty transferring learning, inability to project beyond the present situation, poor reasoning skills, poor abstract thinking, attention deficits <sup>1</sup>	Average to low-average intelligence scores; behavior interfaces with test scores.	Average or above average intellectuality. Mental processing dysfunctions affect thinking and learning disabilities
<i>Academic</i>	Delayed academically. Demonstrates expectancy of failure, has slow learning rate, repeats unsuccessful strategies or tasks, and does not attempt new tasks.	Behavior interfaces with school achievement. Weak, average, or superior academic performance.	Have processing deficits. Lack generalization skills, demonstrate learned helplessness, work slowly on tasks, may or may not have developed coping skills.
<i>Adaptive</i>	Eligibility criteria specify poor adaptive skills. Hyperactivity, low tolerance/ frustration, easily fatigued, moral judgment comparable to mental age. Delayed community and family adaptive skills	Discipline problem. May have anxiety, fears, or physical pain. May be unhappy or depressed	Learn to compensate for deficiencies. Dependency needs. Outer directed.

<sup>1</sup>Attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is a condition that prevents the patient from maintaining focus for long periods.

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<b>Social</b>	<p>Socially and emotionally immature. Unfavorable self-concept<sup>1</sup>. Lacking in self-esteem. Vulnerable to peer influences</p>	<p>Poor peer relations, disruptive behavior, and conduct problems. May be shy and withdrawn or aggressive and violent. Disturbing behavior demonstrated in various settings. Often provoke emotional responses in others.</p>	<p>Lack of social insightfulness. Poor self-esteem. Vulnerable to peer influences. Often feel inferior, but seeks recognition and acceptance.</p>
<b>Perceptual-Motor</b>	<p>Delayed developmental skills affect perception and motor abilities.</p>	<p>Emotional disturbances affect the intact perceptual and motor skills, generally.</p>	<p>Impaired perceptual and motor abilities. Eye-hand coordination problems. Awkward, in the sense of lacking orientation skills.</p>
<b>Language</b>	<p>Speech/ language delayed or deficient. Poor social communication.</p>	<p>Spoken content problems (e.g. argumentative, profane, and vulgar/disrespectful language).</p>	<p>Receptive, integrative, and expressive language difficulties. Deficient processing abilities. Poor social communication.</p>
<b>General Characteristics</b>	<p>Manifest problems adapting to the environment. Underperformance in most academic areas. Excel at physical and motoric skills.</p>	<p>Display behavior that is persistent, rebellious and incompatible with the cultural conventions. May have co-occurring academic deficits.</p>	<p>Manifest specific learning problems in at least one academic area. May have concomitant negative behavior manifestations.</p>

*Source: compiled from IDEA (2006) and Henley et al., (2009).*

<sup>1</sup>**Self-concept** is a multi-dimensional construct that refers to an individual's perception of "self" in relation to any number of characteristics, simply, how one evaluate his/herself.

### ***2.1.2 Cross categorical characteristics***

In addition to the aforementioned features, the three categories share several characteristics that Algozzine, Hanley, and Ramsey (2009) cluster under psychological, educational, and social characteristics. In order to not confuse the three conditions, a mentioning of these mutual symptoms is a certain must because educators cannot only rely on the following characteristics to determine the nature and the category of the deficit, so that they search further for more category-exclusive traits.

#### ***2.1.2.1 Psychological Characteristics***

- Mild disability remains undetected until the child begins school.
- The causes of a mild disability are difficult to detect.
- The physical appearance of children suffering from a mild disability is indifferent from that their healthy peers
- Poor self-concept, in other words, they tend to underestimate their abilities, causing them to have a low self-confidence.

#### ***2.1.2.2 Educational Characteristics***

- Lack of interest in school work.
- Prefer concrete rather than abstract lessons.
- Their listening skills are fairly minimal.
- The level of overall academic achievement is rather low.
- Their usage of language is considered to be primitive, particularly with the basic verbal and writing skills they rely on, as a result to the limited vocabulary they have.
- Right hemisphere preference in learning activities, which imply the lack of creativity in the learning process.
- Their response to active forms of instruction is better than that to passive ones.
- Have hidden talents within them that they fail to awaken because most teachers tend to overlook.
- Students with MDs have higher dropout rate than their other “normal” peers.

## **Mild Disabilities: An Overview**

- Mildly disabled students are highly sensitive toward others views and expectations of them, particularly those of their teachers, so that the higher the expectations of the teacher are, the better their performance and dedication to learning will be.
- For more efficient learning outcomes, the instructor will have to modify the input, so it can be more accessible.
- This type of students can be easily distracted, so the teacher should monitor their every move.

### ***2.1.2.3 Social Characteristics***

- Experience difficulties, particularly frictions, when communing with others.
- Function more effectively outside the school.
- They always feel the need for others approval, precisely from adults.
- Can have difficulties finding jobs and maintaining them, specially the sort of jobs that require a high level of commitment.
- The target of constant harassment by their study mates, and always being stereotyped as being retarded or hostile.
- A common condition between the three conditions is that they exhibit behavior problems.

## ***2.2 An overview of the instructional strategies for the mildly disabled students***

Before going into further details with the specifications of each category, a briefing of the different remedies, the teacher can use as an early intervention or a counter-measure to limit the damage that this sort of deficits can cause to the child's learning attributes, so focusing on strengthening the intellectual skills associated with the learning process, which are suspected to be vulnerable against the deficiencies caused by mild disabilities. However, if the disorder was designated of late, teachers can still develop suitable instructional materials that are specifically designed for the sole purpose of helping students overcome their academic challenges. Certainly, the following summary is far from being a full coverage of the available strategies for handling students with MDs.

### **2.2.1 Cognitive Aspects:**

According to Peter Westwood (2009), in his book “*What Teachers Need to Know about Learners with Disabilities*”, the individual’s cognitive attributes are arguably affected the most by the mild intellectual disabilities (or mild intellectual retardation). Therefore, teachers need to, first, identify the stage of cognitive development, and then adjusting the instructional input (or the teaching style), so match the student’s cognitive abilities and learning preference (or style). Moreover, emotionally disturbed students will require their teachers to adapt the content of their input into a more meaningful experience outside the schools, (i.e. teaching social skills and conventions). On the other hand, students with specific learning disabilities necessitate regular courses about the learning skills, a.k.a. the metacognitive teaching of learning skills, they lack.

### **2.2.2 Academic Aspects**

For Martin Henley (1985), early academic intervention, via the provision of early education, is essential for limiting the damage estimated to be caused by the mild (intellectual) retardation. This early education program will maintain focus on teaching some of the basic intellectual processes such as memorization and observation. Nonetheless, for older mildly retarded students, teaching higher-order thinking skills is immense, and that by intensively practicing some intellectual activities such as those of problem-solving and critical thinking, in addition to teaching every day functional (or career) skills. Moreover, the suggestions made by Henley (1986) mainly evolved around enhancing students motivations toward learning in general, and that by provide emotional support as well as basing their instruction on the learners prior experiences and abilities. As for learning disabilities, a more direct approach is required; in terms of assisting students develop a *self-monitoring* mechanism that would allow gauging how much progress they make, overcoming their disabilities. However, Roger Pierangelo and George Giuliani (2008) agree that teachers are also responsible for monitoring the situation themselves, through maintaining a regular log of both improvements and setbacks that they can later analyze, or request the aid of paraeducators.

### **2.2.3 Language Aspects**

In the first chapter of the book, *Worlds Apart: Disability and Foreign language learning*, Tammy Berberi (2008) stressed the importance of the language teachers sustaining focus on teaching mildly retarded students *intuitive* skills, and raising interest in reading activities by simulating the input to the liking of those students, so that teachers need to abandon any rigid methods of teaching the language and add more flexibility to their instructional input. Moreover, teachers are requested to constantly monitor and analyze the progress made by the learners.

According to Henley et al. (2009), teachers should set up boundaries concerning the cultural and socio-economic diversity in the classroom and the importance of building a mutual respect between all ethnicities and social classes. As to behavior disorders (BDs), teachers will have to build a solid rapport with the designated students, promoting for the open *expression of feelings*. Such chemistry can only be maintained by sharing a *congruent communication* with the students, so that they do not feel alien. Even though each learning disability requires a specific treatment, most strategies evolve basically about the transition from teaching phonics to teaching language as a whole and focusing on right-hemispheric activities. The core idea to countering the effects of learning disabilities on learning language is initially identifying the language processing deficits and then attending to developing *coping-skills* that can help overcoming the imposed obstacles. (Pierangelo & Giuliani, 2008, p. 85-87)

### **2.2.4 Social Aspects**

Steve Chinn (2010) argues that students with special needs tend to display a regular pattern of social-behavior dysfunction that it is similar to a certain extent; due to the fact the mutual feeling of being outcast generates a negative reaction toward society, by either withdrawing from it or taking a more violent direction. Furthermore, he proposes that teachers develop activities that can lift students' morale and build self-confidence (e.g. plays, poetry, reading...). Since most of these children lack the required social skills to become effective member of their respective communities, it is up to teacher to implant and raise their awareness about the different social skills and conventions that need to be respected, and in order to achieve that status, the teacher will

need to help students strengthen both their social perception skills and social behavioral skills. Establishing a *proactive behavior management* program that can be particularly effective for students with emotional disorders; for instance, some students can subscribe into anger managements programs that would help them overcome their stressfulness.

### 2.3 Causes of Mild disabilities

According to Henley, Ramsey, and Algozzine (2009), most mild disabilities can be traced back into two major causes, that is *organic* (or biological) and *environmental* (p. 57). Furthermore, they argue that the severity of the disability is primarily determined by the nature of the causes and the extent of their damage.

As for the organic factors that lead to mild disability, three subcategories are enfolded: *pre-*, *peri-*<sup>1</sup>, and postnatal factors, genetic factors, and maturational lag. Furthermore, Henley and his associates (2009) state that the more severe the disability is the easier the diagnosis would be. In other words, a more severe disability is more likely to have certain external manifestations that would help designating the nature of the deficit. In other words, it has been noticed that infants with disabilities tend to possess some distinguishable characteristics that are not shared with other normal children. These characteristics are mostly visual, such as “*head circumference enlargement, tell-tale facial features, or the slow response to visual and auditory stimulus*” (Henley, Ramsey,& Algozzine, 2009, p. 57). Nonetheless, medical advancements have made pre-birth identification of abnormalities possible, as more accurate scans to the unborn fetus became available. These tests include *ultrasound scans*; or the recording of tissue densities by sound waves, *amniocentesis*; which is the examination of amniotic fluid and culturing of fetal cells, *chorionic villus biopsy*; the examination of placental tissue, *fetoscopy*; the surgical implantation of an endoscope into the host’s uterus), and *blood analysis*, which is a series of analyses of the embryonic cells that migrates from the fetus to the mother’s blood stream.

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<sup>1</sup>A prefix used to signify around (Cambridge dictionary, 2005. 922)

### 2.3.1 Organic and Biological Causes

#### 2.3.1.1 Pre-, Peri-, and Postnatal Factors

B. Pasamanick and H. Knoblock (1973) indicated that mild disabilities are most likely to be the result of prenatal, perinatal, and/or postnatal agents (p. 101). In a book entitled “Children with Learning disabilities”, they suggested the learning problems are caused by the following prenatal factors:

- Maternal endocrine disorders (e.g., hypothyroidism<sup>1</sup>, diabetes).
- Maternal-fatal blood incompatibilities (e.g., the Rh factor: A- vs. A+).
- Maternal age, reproductive readiness, and efficiency.
- Maternal cigarette smoking.
- Maternal drug and alcohol abuse.
- Rubella, also known as the German measles, is an infection in which there is a rash on the skin (“*Rubella*”, 2011).
- Radiation exposure.
- Anoxia (or the drastic decrease in the level of oxygen).
- Accidents.

**N.B.** Infants exposed to alcoholic or any toxic substances, before birth, are endangered of developing the *fetal alcohol syndrome*. This deficiency is chiefly characterized by retardation in their intellectual development and some other severe learning problems.

Furthermore, as both prenatal and postnatal factors, L. B. Silver (1989) argues that any substance abuse can be considered as primary cause of mild disabilities. He moreover clarifies that malnutrition of pregnant women can result of some significant damages to the fetus’s central nervous system, and modifying or hindering the biochemical of the brain. Even after birth, newborns can still be affected by their nursing mothers’ malnutrition and substance abuse, simply, because those toxics can transfer via

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<sup>1</sup> Hypothyroidism is a condition in which the thyroid gland does not make enough thyroid hormone (PubMed Health, Hypothyroidism, 2010)

breastfeeding, in which the mildly disabled toddler might be lacking some vital organic amnions, proteins, or vitamins.

### **2.3.1.2 Genetics**

. Starting from the fact that some mild disabilities were proven to have a genetic background, speaking of deficits such as dyslexia (a learning disability that impairs student's reading ability) occurs in family lineages. Schizophrenia, which is a state of severe emotional disturbance, can, as well, have some genetic tracers. Also, the Riley-Day syndrome can only support the notion of genetic traces because this mental retardation occurs mostly among individuals with a Jewish ethnic background. For further proof, Marfan's syndrome, which is a rare inherited disorder that causes visual impairments and mild intellectual disability, can serve that well (Henley. et.al, 2009, p. 59). These facts about genetic origins of mild disabilities were never intended to deny other theories about the role played by the environment.

Even though, the genes responsible for such disorders are yet to be identified, neuroscientists and geneticists have made quite a considerable progress in the methods of studying the human chromosomes, and with that the hopes for determining precisely what genetic factors are involved in causing those distortions are higher than ever.

### **2.3.1.3 Biochemistry**

Both neurologist and biologists agree that despite the durable physical attributes of the human being, the functionality of his/body relies on a delicate biochemistry system, where more than 100,000 different chemicals (in the form of enzymes and hormones) is needed for that. However, the optimum performance of the human body necessitates that all of those bio-chemicals function in a particular rhythm, and any distortion in those patterns can result in both physical and mental disorders. Any inadequacy of a certain element; such as glucose metabolism, vitamin deficiencies, allergic reactions, and abnormal mineral levels (e.g., iron deficiency), can have some drastic effects on a person's mood, perception, and thinking (Britannica, 2012).

Attempting to establish a connection between some students' misbehaviors, emotional distress, and the chemical reactions of the human body, Hans Seyle (1975)

defines “*stress* as the nonspecific response of the body to a given demand” (p. 29). So according to Seyle, no matter what causes the stress, the chemical reactions are always the same, and that what gives stress, which is a state of emotional disturbance, always resemble a chemical nature. For instance, a student who regards reading as a threatening (or terrifying) activity, or the teacher as an intimidating person may instinctively resort to *flight-or-fight* response (i.e., they would either evade or act aggressively toward the given orders). Some of the non-verbal responses to stress are *withdrawal*, *apathy*, *resentment*, *moodiness*, and *anger*. Therefore, teachers need to be able to identify the physical manifestations of their students’ distress, simply, because emotionally disturbed children are rather helpless, when it come into making their feelings heard, and it is because of this, that they resort to *act* their feelings instead of communicating them verbally.

### 2.3.1.4 *Maturation:*

Henley and his associates (2009) clarify that it is a well-known fact that children have different mental and physical developmental rate. For example, it has been noticed that children who experience a rapid physical development may, as well, have a slight delay in the growth of their nervous system, while other infants characterized of having relatively smaller and weaker physical attributes tend to demonstrate relatively superior reflexes and intellectual abilities to that of their more physically developed counterparts. Therefore, both teachers and parents ought to accumulate a clear idea about this phenomenon and not to push the children too hard, so that they become in danger of developing psychological complexities, such as that of emotional disturbance. However, such maturation discrepancy can turn into a more serious concern, particularly, when the developmental delay takes unusually longer periods of time. This scenario is presumably a consequence of some irregularities in the physical development of infants’ nervous system. Since some reasoning abilities occupy specific areas within the brain, any anomalies in the infant’s neurological development can cause some serious damages to that person’s intellectual abilities. For example, the majority of people have their language-center located in their left front hemisphere and the temporal lobe of the

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neocortex<sup>1</sup>, and any irregularity to that area can limit the individual's abilities of using and learning languages creatively. In other words, the slightest of anomalies can cause a permanent damage to a person's abstract intellectual skills, e.g., reading and calculating. This sort of distortions is most likely to remain undetected until engaging in a formal learning environment such as school. (Henley, Ramsey, & Algozzine, 2008)

G. W. Hynd and C. R. Hynd (1984) argue that all humans experience, to a certain extent, delays and abnormalities in the development of their brains, and there are no two brains that could go through the same developmental scheme (e.g., time stages, growth sections). They suggest also that even the brain entities share no common fixed pattern of growth within the same brain; this can only mean that the development of the brain is an idiosyncratic process. The Hynd brothers (1984) give further clarification in the following:

*While it is easy for psychologists and educators to conceive of separate distributions for IQ, reading achievement, math achievement, personality, and so on, it seems almost impossible for these same professionals to conceive of separate distribution of neurological development. It is almost as if an assumption is made that everyone was born with a perfect unblemished cerebral cortex. (p. 491)*

This statement clearly set up an implication of how those involved in the education of students' with mild disabilities unreasonably keep on defying the possibility of those disabilities being of a biological origin. Further implication are concerned with how that educators are wasting the opportunity for locating the source of the problem to their pupils misfortune because that would help teachers generating instructions that would help students overcome their weaknesses. Since the main focus for any school curriculum is verbal nature, students with language-based learning disabilities attracted more attention than other the other learning disabilities limiting students' artistic abilities.

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<sup>1</sup>Neocortex, or neopallium, is a part of the brain of mammals. It is the outer layer of the cerebral hemispheres, and made up of six layers (Britannica, 2012).

### **2.3.2 Environmental Causes**

In attempt to raise awareness of the role played by the environment in either enhancing or retarding children's intellectual abilities and learning potentials, the Learning Disabilities Association of America (LDAA, 2002) initiated what it called the Healthy Children Project, in 2005, which set to fulfill the following objectives:

- Raise awareness of environmental factors, particularly toxic chemicals that can harm brain development, contributing to learning disabilities and behavior disorders.
- Promote policies and practices to prevent toxic chemical exposures, especially among pregnant women and children.
- Build a nationwide network of LDA members working to protect children's health and reduce toxic exposures that may lead to learning disabilities in current and future generations.

These concerns over the environmental effects on the children's learning potentials are fairly plausible because the nature of the surrounding can, so, determine a child's intellect, for better or worse.

#### **2.3.2.1 Trauma:**

The literal meaning of the term trauma is a severe emotional shock and pain caused by an extremely upsetting experience, however, trauma as a causal environmental factor takes the more specialized meaning that is a severe injury, usually caused by violent attack or horrendous accident (Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 2003, p. 1360). According to the encyclopedia of educational psychology (Salkind, 2008), physical traumas can be caused by, for instance a complicated/premature birth delivery, early injuries, falls, or exposure to chemicals. It is recognized that even in the most domestic environments hazardous situations still arise. Nevertheless, this can never mean that parents are to ignore their children's safety and provide strict safety measures. Moreover, it has been noted that infants who experience early traumas tend to demonstrate a lag in their intellectual maturity, and thus learning readiness.

### 2.3.2.2 Nutrition

*If you don't use the right kind of fuel in your automobile, it won't run properly. It may sputter, jump, jerk, and knock. Similarly, the poor performance of the inattentive, overactive child is often caused by improper "fuel": too much sugar and other junk food and insufficient amounts of essential nutrients, including complex carbohydrates, essential fatty acids, vitamins, and minerals. (Crook, 1980, p. 53)*

Although I would not go as far as comparing human beings to cars, I can only concur to the notion that only a healthy balanced eating nutrition system can help ensuring children a natural biological growth, and that includes the development of the neurological granting children an optimum control of their intellectual abilities.

However, it is not always a case of mere imbalanced nutrition; some children coming from families with limited financial means have exhibited inability to concentrate, fatigue, listlessness, and irritability. According to Martin Henley and his colleagues (2009), the aforementioned symptoms are those of poor nutrition because poor nutrition slows metabolism<sup>1</sup>, and that what strict the functioning of the central nervous system. For example, children suffering from iron deficiency tend to have short attention spans and behavior problems; most of these children come from shattered families, where mothers are young/immature, poor, depressed, and less educated. Ergo, educators, in cooperation with nutrition specialists should hold counseling meetings, in which they provide parents with valid instructions about managing healthy diets for their children, and raising their awareness of the risks carried by poor nutrition.

### 2.3.2.3 Toxins

. Mayron (2003) explains that "environmental contamination" is a contributory source for mild disabling conditions (p. 58). Furthermore, Smith and Paton (1989), in a research about the causes of mild mental retardation prepared for the presidential community on mental retardation, list the following toxics found in environments that

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<sup>1</sup> Metabolism is the set of chemical reactions that happen in the cells of living organisms to sustain life. (Britannica, 2012)

have a strong likelihood for causing learning and emotional complications: hydrocarbons (from coal, petroleum, and natural gas), lead (from such sources as paint, plaster, automobile exhausts), and mercury (from factory-contaminated water streams). A study conducted by H. Wallace (1972) has followed 425 children treated from lead poisoning in Chicago, Illinois, central area. Later on, the study reported 39 percent with neurological damage, 54 percent with recurrent seizures, 38 percent with mental retardation, and the final 13 percent with cerebral palsy<sup>1</sup> (as quoted in Henley, Ramsey, & Algozzine, 2009, p. 62). It is well known that heavy exposure to radiations can be fatal, but slight amounts of radiation are proved to alter humans' genetic setting, and that what cause afterbirth malformations, both physical and mental anomalies (Britannica, 2012). Smith, Price, and Marsh (1986) have associated between exposure to radiation and learning and behavior problems, in the sense that exposure can disrupt the cellular harmony of the human.

### 2.3.2.4 *Language and Sensory Deprivation*

Piaget (1950) stressed the importance of exterior stimulation that initiates and motivates students to learn. Hence, the absence of sensory, linguistic, and cognitive stimulations can impede the intellectual and emotional maturity. The case of Genie Wiley<sup>2</sup> (1970) serves as a testament to the importance of providing proper stimulus for children's learning that serves as an initiator, as well as an input provider. However, social isolation can be considered as an extreme case scenario that deprives the person entirely from discovering and learning from the natural surroundings. A more common situation is during infant and preschool years, when overlooked health problems such as ear infections can hinder involvement in activities that are important to academic readiness.

Foreign language learners' considerably limited exposure to authentic FL input has always been a major obstacle to developing their linguistic abilities. It is similar to how children develop verbal language problems when adequate models are unavailable to

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<sup>1</sup> Cerebral palsy is a group of disorders that can involve brain and nervous system functions such as movement, learning, hearing, seeing, and thinking. (PubMed Health, 2009)

<sup>2</sup> **Genie** is the pseudonym for a feral child who spent nearly all of the first thirteen years of her life locked inside a bedroom strapped to a potty chair. She was a victim of one of the most severe cases of social isolation ever documented.

them during early years whilst speech is being formed (during the critical period). In other words, if children's caregivers are unable to initiate speech (e.g., because they may not be able to use the language due to a disability or are not being familiar with it) or respond to a youngster's speech efforts, the child's linguistic abilities will suffer greatly.

### ***2.3.2.5 Emotional and Psychological Factors***

Mary Ainsworth (1989) explains that most children with mild learning, intellectual, and emotional disorders exude a lack of self-esteem, insecurity, irritability, insecurity, low frustration tolerance, and impulsive behavior. Home life that at an early age is unstable, abusive, or psychologically stressful contributes to poor emotional and social development of youngsters. Furthermore, some children are considerably slow to respond to maternal bonding and nurturing, and that what causes some children to shut themselves away from the rest, and even refusing to be comforted during troublesome situations. (Ainsworth, 1989, p. 710)

### ***2.3.2.6 Inadequate Education***

The low expectations for students with mild learning and behavior irregularities are considered handicapping factors to students' educational development. Poor instructional programs, disorganized teaching practices, and negative expectations for educational outcomes of children with mild disabling conditions contribute to learning difficulties. Hallahan and Kauffman (1994) propose the following teachers' behaviors as contributors to the school failure of student with mild disabling challenges: insensitivity to individuality, requirement of conformity to rules and routines, inappropriate behaviors, and emphasis on student inadequacies.

According to Smith and Patton (1989), insufficient development of the prerequisites readiness learning skills occurs both in home and school. The absence of intellectually stimulating experiences and lack of exposure to materials that will be used in school, all, contribute to the academic delay, and if a child is confined with these negative conditions, he/she will be surely destined to an academic failure.

### ***Conclusion***

Having chosen to conduct a research about the possible effects of mild disabilities on learning EFL in the middle school, it is a must to deliver a proper introduction to such concept that seems to be out of the Algerian educational systems' "radar" because with all due fair the indistinguishable nature of this sort of deficits does not help much. However, the educational setting is arguably about the only environment where these disabilities manifest the clearest. Therefore, an overview was needed for shaping some basic knowledge about the different characteristics and definitions of mild disability, and that what exactly was provided through this chapter.

Given the fact that searching for the effects of a certain phenomenon always initiates from inquiring its origins, a brief compilation of some of the main causes of mild disabilities was made. Most notably is the fact that unlike other sorts of, severe, mental and motor disabilities, mild disabilities are not exclusively inborn complications, but rather developmental disabilities, as well. Individuals can develop these sorts of disabilities, when encountered with environmental factors that invite developing such disabilities.

Relating to the following chapter, it ought to be reckoned that mild disabilities are subcategorized into mild intellectual disabilities, emotional disturbance, and specific learning disabilities. Nonetheless, in addition to the previously mentioned inter-categorical symptoms, the most obvious trait shared by all three categories is that they have no distinguishable physical manifestation whatsoever. This uneasy-to-detect nature is basically what awards mild disabilities its name. In order to construct a solid knowledge about the different ramifications and symptoms of each of the categories, a detailed report is introduced in the following, third, chapter.

# ***Chapter 3: The Chief Three Categories of Mild Disabilities***

## **3.1 Mild Intellectual Disabilities**

### **3.1.1 Definition and Identification**

### **3.1.2 The Types of Intellectual Disabilities**

### **3.1.3 The Effects of Mild Intellectual Disabilities on Language Acquisition**

## **3.2 Emotional Disturbance**

### **3.2.1 Definition and Recognition**

### **3.2.2 Synopsis of some of the Prominent Behavioral and Emotional Disorders**

### **3.2.3 The effects of Emotional Disturbance on Language Acquisition: Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)**

## **3.3 Specific Learning Disabilities**

### **3.3.1 Definition and Identification**

### **3.3.2 Types of Specific Learning Disability**

### ***3 The Chief Three Categories of Mild Disabilities***

#### ***Introduction:***

In their book *Characteristics of and Strategies for Teaching Students with Mild Disabilities*, Martin Henley, Roberta Ramsey, and Robert Algozzine (2009) draw the distinction between three major categories of the mildly disabling conditions. These categories were based on the nature of impact and damage they cause the individual. Ergo, students with relatively lower intellectual abilities were categorized as having *mild intellectual disabilities, or* mild mental retardation. The following category might be the most overlooked amongst the three because emotionally troubled individuals are less often regarded as having disabilities, but as simply mere troublemakers and weirdoes who fail to integrate in their environment. These sorts of behavior abnormalities are known as cases of *emotional disturbance*, where these disabling behaviors vary, in manifestation, from hostile to withdrawal. A third case is that of students experiencing challenges in particular academic fields; consequently, this type of disabilities remain uncovered during the preschool period, to emerge when the child engages in the learning of the challenging area (e.g., reading, spelling, arithmetics...). The following chapter will provide further insights to the nature and characteristics of each category.

#### ***3.1 Mild Intellectual Disabilities***

Ever since the introduction of intelligence test, later known as the IQ test or the Intelligence Quantum, by the French psychologist Alfred Binet and his subordinates; Theodore Simon and Jean Piaget, in 1904, psychologist become able to gauge, to a certain extent, the intellectual abilities that a person possesses. Subsequently, psychologists were able to discriminate three levels, according to the severity, of intellectual deficiency, severe, moderate and mild. According to the American national center for education statistics (NCES, 2007), the total sum of students with intellectual disabilities has reached 600,000. The plain majority of these cases, 80 percent, were labeled as mild intellectual disabilities. It is this kind of high numbers that leads us to wonder about how grave the situation is in our country, particularly when intellectual

## **The Chief Three Categories**

disabilities are most common in economically poor societies, such as the case for most of the third world countries, which we happen to be a part of. The reason for such assumptions is that the statistics indicate that the number of mild intellectual disabilities tend to have high rates amongst lower class individuals, particularly African Americans and Latin Americans. However, this cannot be interpreted as an attempt to associate having mild intellectual disabilities to the particular genetic attributes of particular groups.

Peter Westwood (2009) asserts that, psychologically, the constant academic failures, students with mild intellectual disabilities experience, have devastating effects on the way these youngsters value themselves and what they are capable of doing, leading them to withdraw into a state of solitude. Likewise, situations of *language-use deficiency* arise, manifested in weak skills and various other speech disorders. The American association on intellectual and developmental disabilities (the AAIDD) initiated a series of complaints condemning the discriminative exploitation of the term *mental retardation*; the term was thusly altered to *intellectual disability*.

### **3.1.1 Definition and Identification**

Given the fact that intellectual disabilities, or mental retardations, have been one of the first categories to gain recognition in the educational psychology community as a hindering deficit to the learning process, beginning with the early intelligence tests of Alfred Binet in 1904, it is quite plausible to have numerous definitions to MIDs. Beginning with the definition of IDEA, the individuals with disabilities education act, which uses the label “*mental retardation*” regardless to the roaring protests from various individual with special need associations such as AAIDD:

*Mental retardation means significantly subaverage general intellectual functioning, existing concurrently with deficits in adaptive behavior and manifested during the developmental period that adversely affects a child's educational performance. (“Child with a Disability,” 2006, Sec.300.8.C6)*

Not very differently, the American association on intellectual and developmental disabilities proposes the following definition:

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*Intellectual disability is a disability characterized by significant limitations both in intellectual functioning and in adaptive behavior, which covers many everyday social and practical skills. This disability originates before the age of 18. (AAIDD, 2010)*

Since the detection of disorders in the intellectual development is not a mere gauging of their intelligence –the AAIDD defines intelligence as the intellectual processing- vessel through IQ tests. The procedure is far more complex than that, David Brooks (2007) of *the New York Times* illustrates:

*...Judging intelligence is less like measuring horsepower in an engine and more like watching ballet. Speed and strength are part of intelligence and these things can be measured numerically, but the essence of the activity is found in the rhythm and grace and personality of an idiosyncratic blend of emotions, experiences, motivations, and inheritances. (p. A21)*

In other words, intelligence involves more factors other than the rate of info-processing, such as emotions and other adaptive abilities, and that what is called *emotional intelligence* (encyclopedia of educational psychology, 2008). Moreover, reports, issued by the American association on intellectual and developmental disabilities (AAIDD, 2010), demonstrate that there are two primary characteristics to be scrutinized in the course of designating intellectual retardations, so for a person to be qualified as intellectually disabled he must be diagnosed of ***limited intellectual functionality*** and ***adaptive behavior impairments***. As for the person limitations of intellectual functionality, he/she can be exposed to an IQ test, and if the person fails to score a more than *two deviations below* mean on a standardized intelligence test. On the other hand, adaptive behavior reflects the individual's independence and the ability to cope with living requirements, and that includes practical skills such as preparing meals, dressing, managing housekeeping activities, and using the phone.

Nonetheless, the AAIDD (2010) recommends keeping the following tips into consideration when attempting to determine the existence of an intellectual disability:

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- Valid assessment considers cultural and linguistic diversity, as well as differences in communications in behavioral factors.
- The existence of limitation in adaptive skills occurs within the context of community environments typical of the individual's age peers and is indexed to the person's individualized needs for supports.
- Specific adaptive limitations often coexist with strengths in other adaptive skills or other personal capabilities.
- With appropriate supports over a strained period, the life functioning of the person with intellectual disability will generally improve.

To conclude, a mild intellectual disability is reflected in difficulties of learning and performing certain life skills. IQ scores of 70 and 50 on one or more individually administered intelligence tests are considered to be the mild intellectual disability range. However, *limited intelligence*, usually low IQ scores, is insufficient for calling an intellectual disability, since the individual must also demonstrate *limited adaptive skills*. The American association on intellectual and developmental disabilities (AAIDD, 2010) recognizes two categories of adaptive skills, *social* and *practical* skills. Concerning the adaptive social skills, the focus should be maintained on interpersonal skills, responsibility, self-esteem, gullibility, following rules, avoiding victimization, obeying laws, and naiveté. As for the practical adaptive skills, they include meal preparation, housekeeping, transportation, dressing, taking medicine, money management, telephone use, and personal hygiene.

### **3.1.2 The Types of Intellectual Disabilities:**

Based on the nature of the adversative cause, mild intellectual disabilities can be classified into *environmental* and *organic* disabilities. The following table demonstrates the characteristics and the differences between the two categories:

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**Table 3.1:** *Overview of the Characteristics of and Differences between Environmental and Organic Intellectual Disabilities*

<i>ENVIRONMENTAL INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES</i>	<i>ORGANIC INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES</i>
Primary cause is environmental	Primary cause is biological/genetic
Normal physical appearance	Appearance anomalies
Subtle health complications	Obvious health complications
Identified after beginning school	Identified at birth or soon afterwards
Developmentally delayed	Developmentally disabled
After school, able to merge into the general population	Disability is chronic and often require life-long support
Higher prevalence among poor with African Americans overrepresented	Cuts cross all socioeconomic and ethnic groups
Subjects to misidentification	Demonstrates clear cut diagnostic criteria
Not recognized as a disability in all countries	Universally recognized as a disability

*Source: synthesized from Martin Henley et al. (2009)*

### **3.1.3 The Effects of Mild Intellectual Disabilities on Language Acquisition:**

It must be mentioned that the effects of mild disabilities are not limited to mathematical processes, so it is common. Intellectual disabilities have a wide array of negative influence on the functioning of a number of fundamental intellectual processes. For instance, the introduction of Jean Piaget’s (1950) developmental theory has allowed educators to track the infant’s *cognitive* developmental status, and thus determining what stage he/she has reached, aiding them significantly tailoring instructional materials accordingly. Other form of intellectual deficiency is the limited ability to perform highly *complicated mental processes*, such as hypothesizing, problem-solving, and other forms of higher order thinking. More importantly for language teachers is the side effects caused to the ability of performing linguistic functions (speaking, reading, memorizing vocabulary...). It has been recognized that intellectually disabled individuals can suffer from different forms of language related disorders, namely *language deficiency and*

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*language difference*. Initially, Bernstein (1961) illustrates language deficiency in the case of poor socioeconomic environments, where the language can be described as a “restricted code,” due to their narrow vocabulary and raw of topics. His reasoning for such assumption is that poor children’s experiences in rational thought and ideological interlocution were limited because of their parents’ rigid and authoritative treatment. As a result, these disadvantaged children are doomed to fail developing an effective understanding of the abstract concepts such as casualty and long-range planning. On similar basis, Bereiter and Englemann (1966) amen the fact that a deprived environment can have some drastic effects on speech; further consequences are manifested in academic misachievement (as quoted in Henley, Ramsey, & Algozzine, 2009, p. 98-100). In other words, this population’s ability to use language focalizes to premature levels similar to that of younger age categories. As a solution, some preschool programs such as DISTAR<sup>1</sup> that targeted the language deficiencies of those children with limited means. The program focuses on teaching new vocabulary, labeling objects, and presenting basic school readiness skills.

Case of *language difference* occurs particularly in cases of foreign language users. Langdon (1983) argues that it is quite the daunting task, diagnosing a *mild disability* among “*language foreigner users*”. The assessment of language disorders analyzes a variety of skills, including *auditory discrimination, articulation, verbal expression, and comprehension of complex relationships*. Henriette Langdon proceeds explaining that “the purpose of testing a non-English or limited-English-proficient student is determine his or her proficiency in the native language and to compare it with the performance in the second language, when appropriate” (1983, p. 39). Simply, the underlined objective is set to verify whether the lack of proficiency is due to a general language-disorder or is a mere reflection to the difficulties of learning a new language.

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<sup>1</sup>**DISTAR** is an acronym for **D**irect **I**nstruction **S**ystem for **T**eaching **A**rithmetic and **R**eading, a trademarked program of SRA/McGraw-Hill, a commercial publishing company. The program is used particularly for historically disadvantaged and/or at-risk students.

### 3.2 *Emotional Disturbance*

It is a common pedagogical phenomenon that of having students who are seemingly unwilling to cooperate with their teacher, due to their constant misconduct. This promoted for some extreme solutions, some teachers called for to eradicate such *nuisance* from their instructional environment. However, the question aren't these students as well that need further attention from those educationally responsible for their academic wellbeing, but it appears that few are willing to halt and reflect the possible motives for such behavior. This learning adversary condition is known as *Emotional disturbance*, the second category of mild disabilities. Emotional disturbance (ED), or behavior disorder (BD), gained official recognition by being labeled as one of the thirteen major learning disabilities that were issued in the individuals with disabilities education act (IDEA, 2006). It is only natural for teachers to seek answer of what drives those mischievous students to behave in that manner. This part is decided for unraveling the truth of such disturbance, so that teachers can accumulate a clearer understanding of the true feelings of those children. After all, implanting an input is not the sole objective for teachers who are also entrusted with the future of the young generation. This was publically echoed through the teachings of the humanistic approach, whose ideas encouraged teachers to develop a better understanding of their students' humanistic needs (e.g. emotional needs). Hence, teachers must learn how to gain their trust, so that they can resolve some of their unrest. Questions about the origins, nature, and remediation of this category of disorders are set to be answered in the following.

#### 3.2.1 *Definition and Recognition*

*Behavior Disorder, emotionally disturbed, antisocial, opposition defiant disorder, and conduct disorder* are terms used by professionals to explain the special needs of students who cannot adapt to the social necessities of society or school. It has been aforementioned that IDEA (2006) gave recognition to emotional disturbance as one of the thirteen learning disabilities, and so a governmental definition of the phenomenon was provided, "Emotional disturbance means a condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely

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affects a child's educational performance” (IDEA, 2006, Sec. 300.8, 4.i). IDEA proposes five features of the mentally disturbed children:

- An inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors.
- An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers.
- Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances.
- A general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression.
- A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems.

Henley and his associates (2009) highlight a number of behaviors that are typical of students with mild disabilities inside the classroom:

- Exhibits physical and verbal aggression toward classmates (such as fighting and instigating arguments)
- Exhibits verbal aggression toward teacher and other authority figures (using profanity and negative names)
- Refuses to cooperate in classroom group activities
- Intentionally damage classroom materials
- Uses classroom materials to create disruptive sounds and noises

Even though, shy and withdrawn attitude is a clear indication of serious emotional problems, Henley, Ramsey, and Algozzine (2009) argue that if the shy student is able to efficiently perform academic assignments, it can slip unnoticed, these sorts of condition. However, El Sayed Dadour (2008) explains that shyness can become a hurdling factor for performing language learning communicative activities, so that teachers will need to adapt their instructional behavior to involve this withdrawn category.

The article of Gresham, MacMillan, and Bocian (1996, p. 277-292) synthesize a number of indicators that educators can look for, so they can designate students who are

enduring emotional conflicts. The indicators were classified according to their origins and manifestations into *internalized*, *externalized*, and *outside of school* indicators.

### ***3.2.1.1 Internalized emotional problems indicators***

The following symptoms are common among students with withdrawn personality that can develop into depression or suicidal attitude.

- Anxiety
- Lack of interpersonal relationships ( friends)
- Incomplete work ( lack of determination)
- Mood swings
- Learned helplessness
- Interest in cults
- Inordinate attraction to fantasy
- Bully victim
- Frequent absences
- Inappropriate affect (e.g., crying)
- Obsessive/compulsive behavior
- Shyness

### ***3.2.1.2 Externalized emotional problems indicators***

The headlines for this type of personality are that it can be aggressive, confrontational, and socially maladjusted.

- Chronic discipline
- Lack of sympathy or compassion toward others
- Anger outbursts
- Poor academic performance
- Conflicts with authority figures
- Bullying other students
- Frequent absences
- Physical aggression

- Damaging prosperity and other illegal behaviors
- Obscene language
- Ignoring teacher warnings

### ***3.2.1.3 Outside of school emotional problems indicators***

Parents (or other legal guardians) can be involved in the identification of emotional anomalies, so teachers need to inform the child guardians of any suspicious changes on the level of personality because teenagers are quite unpredictable, and so adults need to provide guidance.

- Depression, and any past cases of depression within the family
- Any history of neglect, physical, sexual, or emotional abuse
- Chronic discipline problems
- Participating in domestic violence
- Loss of appetite, or overeating
- Long periods of isolation watching TV or on computer
- Sleep disturbances or nightmares

### ***3.2.2 Synopsis of some of the Prominent Behavioral and Emotional Disorders***

Kristin Liabo and Joanna Richardson (2007) provide an overview of a number of emotional disturbance conditions that they believe to have negative effect on the pedagogical development of young people.

#### ***3.2.2.1 Opposition Defiant Disorder (ODD)***

This condition is described as a pattern of negativistic, hostile, and defiant behavior lasting at least 6 months. Included among eight list behaviors are often *losing temper*, often *angry*, *resentful*, and *deliberately annoys others*. However, for a person to be characterized as having an ODD, at least four of the aforementioned behaviors must be demonstrated.

#### ***3.2.2.2 Conduct Disorder (CD)***

The second form of behavior dysfunction is a repetitive pattern of behavior in which the basic rights of others or major age-appropriate social norms or rules are

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violated. Specific behavioral Criteria are listed under the following: *aggression to people and animals, destruction of property, deceitfulness, theft, and other serious violation of rules*. In other words, Conduct disorders are characterized as the more severe, chronic, and pervasive forms of behavioral problems. They include a range of inappropriate, destructive, and sometimes malicious actions that constitute psychopathology (encyclopedia of educational psychology, 2008, p. 172).

### **3.2.2.3 Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)**

According to the encyclopedia of educational psychology (2008), Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is a diverse behavioral syndrome affecting 3 to 7 percent of children in the United States, characterized by *inattention, overactivity, and impulse control problems*, and it that boys are three times more likely than girls to be diagnosed with ADHD (p. 79). IDEA (2006) recognizes three different types of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder: *inattention, hyperactivity-impulsivity, and combined*. Each type has a list of symptoms that persist for at least 6 months. Inattention is characterized by six or more traits including difficulties with sustained attention, listening, following direction, memory, and finishing tasks. As for hyperactivity-impulsivity, the affected children are most likely to reflect six or more of total nine traits including fidgeting (restless playing), excessive talking, constant moving, impatience, and interrupting others.

### **3.2.2.4 Asperger's Syndrome (AS)**

The syndrome is named after the Austrian pediatrician Hans Asperger who, in 1944, studied and described children in his practice who lacked nonverbal communication skills, demonstrated limited empathy with their peers, and were *physically clumsy* (Asperger, 1991, p. 38). Even though, the anomalies caused by Asperger's Syndrome are, somehow, similar to those of autism, the damage caused by the latter is far more severe, plus, Asperger's syndrome can be distinguished from autism by the fact that AS, unlike autism, was not recorded to cause damages to the cognitive maturation of the individual. Nonetheless, both Asperger's syndrome and autism are two subcategories of the autism spectrum, where AS can be considered as the mild version of autism (encyclopedia of educational psychology, 2008, p. 82). Asperger's syndrome can

be defined as a developmental disorder characterized by peculiar preoccupations with a particular topic that excludes all other interests. Behavioral traits include repetitive routines/rituals, oddities in speech, inappropriate social behavior, and uncoordinated motor movements. Surprisingly, some children with Asperger's syndrome have shown that they are capable of transforming their lack of social skills into exceptional intellectual abilities, aided by their keen eye to details. As for their linguistic behavior, Henley et al (2009) reckons that student with AS can develop a highly complicated linguistic abilities "...similar to that of a university teacher" (p. 45), but most of them are unable to apply their rich vocabulary in a social or a pragmatic situation.

### 3.2.2.5 *Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)*

According the encyclopedia of educational psychology (2008), autism, autism spectrum disorders (ASDs), and related universal developmental disabilities are neurological disorders that involve primarily problems of *communication*, *socialization*, and *behavior*. Individuals diagnosed with ASD express the disability in a variety of ways, and a wide range of abilities, strengths, and limitations are common. This once very rare condition of childhood is now commonly diagnosed. ASD has been one of the most researched conditions over the past few decades, and much progress has been made in understanding and supporting persons with the disability. The exact causes are not fully understood, although poor parenting has been thoroughly disproven as a cause. (Henley, Ramsey, & Algozzine, 2009, p. 177)

Even when compared with other disabilities, ASD is an enigma. Children and youth identified as having ASD present highly individualized characteristics that differ them from their typically developing peers and those with other types of disabilities. Some individuals with ASD have near- or above-average cognitive and language abilities with evidence of their disability manifested in the form of subtle social peculiarities. Others have significant cognitive impairments, limited or no expressive language, and severe behavioral and social abnormalities (Westwood, 2009, p. 30). Individuals with ASD sometimes demonstrate isolated abilities and highly developed splinter skills that contribute to the syndrome's mystery. Fierce debates over the causes of ASD,

intervention choices, and educational programming have also been prominent in the recent history of the disability.

### 3.2.2.6 *Bipolar Disorder*

According to the national alliance on mental illness (NAMI, 2006), Bipolar disorder, or manic depression, is a medical illness that causes extreme shifts in mood, energy, and functioning. These changes may be subtle or dramatic, and typically vary greatly over the course of a person's life as well as among individuals. Over 10 million people in America have bipolar disorder, and the illness affects men and women equally. Bipolar disorder is a chronic and generally life-long condition with recurring episodes of *mania* and *depression* that can last from days to months that often begin in adolescence or early adulthood, and occasionally even in children. Most people generally require some sort of lifelong treatment. While medication is one key element in successful treatment of bipolar disorder, psychotherapy, support, and education about the illness are also essential components of the treatment process. It has been previously mentioned that there are two levels of manifestation in a bipolar disorder, *depression* and *mania*. The following is a description of the symptoms that occur in each phase.

#### *Mania state:*

Mania is the word that describes the activated phase of bipolar disorder. The symptoms of mania may include:

- Either an elated, happy mood or an irritable, angry, unpleasant mood
- Increased physical and mental activity and energy
- Racing thoughts and flight of ideas
- Increased talking, more rapid speech than normal
- Ambitious, often grandiose plans
- Risk taking
- Impulsive activity such as spending sprees, and substance abuse
- Decreased sleep without experiencing fatigue

#### *Depression State*

Depression is the other phase of bipolar disorder. The symptoms of depression may include:

- Loss of energy
- Prolonged sadness
- Decreased activity and energy
- Restlessness and irritability
- Inability to concentrate or make decisions
- Increased feelings of worry and anxiety
- Less interest or participation in, and less enjoyment of activities normally enjoyed
- Feelings of guilt and hopelessness
- Thoughts of suicide
- Change in appetite (either eating more or eating less)
- Change in sleep patterns (either sleeping more or sleeping less)

**N.B.** individuals with bipolar disorder might enter into a *mixed* state where both mania and depression manifestations are present.

### 3.2.2.7 *Early Onset Depression (EOD)*

The national institution of mental health (NIMH, 2009) explains that early onset depression often persists, recurs, and continues into adulthood, and that depression in youth may also predict more severe illness in adult life. Moreover, an NIMH sponsored study of 9 to 17 years olds estimates that the prevalence of any depressive disorder is more than 6 percent in a six month period, with 4.9 percent having major depression. Also, the study clarifies that before puberty, boys and girls are equally likely to develop depressive disorders. After age 14, however, females are twice as likely as males to have major depression or dysthymia<sup>2</sup>. The risk of developing bipolar disorder remains approximately equal for males and females throughout adolescence and adulthood.

The depressed younger child may say he is sick, refuse to go to school, cling to a parent, or worry that the parent may die. The depressed older child may sulk, get into

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<sup>2</sup>**Dysthymia**, also known as **neurotic depression**, is a mood disorder consisting of chronic depression, with less severe but longer lasting symptoms than major depressive disorder

trouble at school, be negative and grouchy, and feel misunderstood. Signs of depressive disorders in young people are often viewed as normal mood swings typical of a particular developmental stage. In addition, health care professionals may be reluctant to prematurely “label” a young person with a mental illness diagnosis. However, early diagnosis and treatment of depressive disorders are critical to healthy emotional, social, and behavioral development. Depression in young people frequently co occurs with other mental disorders, most commonly anxiety, disruptive behavior, or substance abuse disorders, as well as with other serious illnesses such as diabetes. (Liabo & Richardson, 2007)

### ***3.2.3 The effects of Emotional Disturbance on Language Acquisition: Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)***

Francesca Happe (1994) reckons that individuals with autistic disorder very often fail to generate an efficient understanding of others perception of feelings, so that they can respect their cognitive abilities. The ability to be considerate to others’ emotions and beliefs was called *theory of mind*<sup>3</sup>, which Happe (1994) assessed by using what she calls theory of mind tasks that “assess the attribution of optimistic mental states, intentions, and motivations, and affective states” (Happe, 1994, p. 140). In the field of cognitive development, these tasks are usually pursued with children over the age of three, in coordination with language development for interaction with the researcher. These tasks are presented as behavioral tasks to the subject. Simon Cohen (2001) explains that the theory of mind difficulties seem to be universal among individuals that are present on the autism spectrum. When asked to differentiate between mental and physical activities, children ages 3–4 had difficulty assessing which was which accurately. Additionally, they tend to have issues understanding figurative speech or appropriate speech with respect to the social context.

The longitudinal research of Nadège Foudon, Anne Reboul, and Sabine Manificat (2007) on the effects of autism on the acquisition of language has revealed that, as adults,

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<sup>3</sup>**Theory of mind** is the ability to attribute mental states, beliefs, intents, desires, pretending, and knowledge to oneself and others and to understand that others have beliefs, desires and intentions that are different from one's own

only half of autistic patients are capable of speech and their linguistic abilities are lower than normal healthy subjects. Autistic children do not seem to acquire language by involvement with others. Mean-length-utterance, a measure of linguistic productivity, evolves rapidly in autistic children, i.e., this category of children utilizes more words than needed to describe simple ideas. A possible rationale is that they do not have enough referential vocabulary to trigger syntax. Referential words, the understanding of what a specific word refers to, is contrasted by relational vocabulary. Limited grammatical acquisition may be attributed to a decreased lexicon of referential words. Although Linguistic and non-linguistic elements evolve with isolated and specific social and cognitive elements, with autism there is mutual interference. As a result, gestural means of communication are used by both non-verbal and verbal autistic children. The mother may also have an influence on development of communication. (Foudon, Reboul, & Manificat, 2007)

According to the level of severity and effect on language development, autism spectrum disorders can be classified into three categories of patients. First, Individuals with Asperger's syndrome do acquire language to a normal degree but with a slight delay in the process of acquisition, verbal autistic children who experience some delay in acquiring the language, and individuals who are never capable of language acquisition, they are considered nonverbal. These delays and difficulties in acquiring the language are due to the constraints that autism syndrome disorders impose on social interaction, which is crucial for children building their linguistic system for the first time.

### ***3.3 Specific Learning Disabilities***

The research has, so far, presented an overview of the characteristics and symptoms of two main categories of mild disability, intellectual disturbance and emotional disturbance. However, the complications caused by these previous two are not constrained to the pedagogical milieu; such effects defect individuals intellectually, emotionally, and socially. Unlike the other two categories, the third, specific learning disabilities, is rather unique, for they are virtually undetectable outside the learning setting. Specific learning disabilities (SpLDs) can be considered as a side-effect phenomenon that accompanies those intellectual and behavioral deficiencies some

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students may have. Peter Westwood (2009) states that approximately 3 children in every 100 are diagnosed with a specific learning disability manifested, for instance, in difficulties in reading, writing, and mathematics that cannot be traced to any severe mental retardation, sensory impairment, cultural or linguistic disadvantage, or inadequate teaching instructions. Furthermore, Westwood (2009) proceeds to hypothesize that those statistics may not reflect an accurate description of the prevalence of this phenomenon because students suffering from SpLDs are often mistakenly regarded as students lacking motivation to learn, thus being labeled as lazy, carefree individuals, and by the end of their educational life, a large number of learning disabled students remain untreated and unaware of their misfortune. However, a treatment can only be provided if the disorder is identified; teachers are the most likely source for identifying the dysfunction in their students learning abilities, and to attain such ability teachers need to combine their knowledge of the taught skills with that of the characteristics and complications caused by learning disabilities. In addition to providing an outline of some efficient teaching strategies, this part will also attempt to portray the traits that would allow diagnosing these deficits.

### **3.3.1 Definition and Identification**

Given their nature, Specific learning disabilities are by default included in the individuals with disabilities education act's classification of the thirteen learning disabilities.

*The term '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 disorder may manifest itself in imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations. Such term includes such conditions as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. Such term does not include a learning problem that is primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities; of mental retardation; of emotional disturbance; or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage. (IDEA, Sec 300.8.C.10, 2004)*

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Based on the provided definition, learning disabilities occur on the level of the following academic areas:

- **Reading:** the majority of students with learning difficulties exhibit two or more years delay in their reading ability.
- **Spoken language:** it has been also observed that there can be delays, disorders, or discrepancies in listening and speaking.
- **Written Language:** difficulties with reading are accompanied with difficulties in writing and spelling.
- **Arithmetic:** difficulty in performing arithmetic<sup>4</sup> functions or in comprehending basic concepts.
- **Reasoning:** difficulty in organizing and integrating thoughts.
- **Organization skills:** difficulty in organizing facets of learning. (Henley, Ramsey, & Algozzine, 2009, p. 177)

Levine Mel (2003), from the national center for learning disabilities (NCLD), provides synopsis of the defects that individuals with learning difficulties may confront throughout their educational life and, even, prior to that. Next will be a demonstration of the anomalies to be expected from learning-disabled students. The following indicators have been divided chronologically from prior school to higher education levels.

### *1. Preschool*

- *Language:* pronunciation problems, slow vocabulary growth, and lack of interest in storytelling.
- *Memory:* trouble learning numbers, alphabet, days of week, etc. poor memory for routines.
- *Attention:* trouble sitting still, extreme restlessness, and impersistence at tasks.
- *Fine motor skills:* trouble learning self-helping skills (e.g., tying shoelaces, reluctance to draw or race).

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<sup>4</sup>**Arithmetic** or **arithmetics** is the oldest and most elementary branch of mathematics, used by almost everyone, for tasks ranging from simple day-to-day counting to advanced science and business calculations.

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- *Other functions:* trouble learning left from right (possible visual confusion).

### **2. Lower Grades**

- *Language:* delayed decoding abilities for reading.
- *Memory:* slow recall of facts, organizational problems, slow acquisition of new skills, and poor spelling.
- *Attention:* impulsivity, lack of planning, careless errors, instability, and distractibility.
- *Fine motor skills:* unstable pencil grip, and trouble with letter formation.
- *Other functions:* trouble interacting (weak social skills), trouble learning about time (temporal disorganization), and poor grasp of math facts.

### **3. Middle Grade:**

- *Language:* poor reading comprehension, lack of verbal participation in class, and trouble with problems.
- *Memory:* poor, illegible writing, slow or poor recall of math facts, and failure of automatic recall.
- *Attention:* inconsistency, poor self-monitoring, great knowledge of trivia, and distaste for fine details.
- *Fine motor skills:* fist-like or tight pencil grip, illegible, slow or inconsistent writing, and reluctance to write.
- *Other functions:* poor learning strategies, disorganization in time or space, and peer rejection.

### **4. Upper Grades:**

- *Language:* weak grasp of explanations, foreign language problems, poor written expression, and trouble summarizing.
- *Memory:* trouble studying for tests, weak cumulative memory, and slow work pace.
- *Attention:* memory problems due to weak attention mental fatigue.
- *Fine motor skills:* less relevance of fine motor skills because of these learners are expected to overcome those issues, by this time.
- *Other functions:* poor grasp of abstract concepts, failure to elaborate, and trouble taking test, multiple choice questions. (Westwood, 2009)

*N.B.* students must exhibit these symptoms for over 6 months, in order to qualify as learning-disabled. (IDEA, 2006)

### ***3.3.2 Types of Specific Learning Disability***

Roger Pierangelo and George Giuliani (2008) recognize nine different types of learning disability, namely, auditory processing disorder (APD), dyscalculia (Arithmetic Disorders), dyslexia (reading disorders), dysorthographia (spelling disorders), nonverbal learning disabilities (NLD), organizational learning disorders, social cue disorder, and visual processing disorder. The following will provide some insight into those types, their nature and their effects.

#### ***3.3.2.1 Auditory Processing Disorder (APD)***

Pierangelo and Giuliani (2008) clarify that auditory processing disorders (APD) interfere with the individual's ability to analyze or make sense of information taken through the auditory channel. However, APD conditions are not to be confused with other forms of hearing impairment, such as deafness or weak hearing, because auditory processing disorders do not affect the individual's hearing functionality. In other words, having an auditory processing disorder implies that something is adversely affecting the processing or interpretation and the discrimination of the information received through the auditory channel, i.e., ears. Moreover, the national center for learning disabilities (NCLD, 2009a) proposes the following symptoms that most individuals with auditory processing disorder exhibit:

- Difficulty with some or all listening activities
- Particular problems when activities occur in less-than-ideal listening environments
- Problems with sound discrimination
- Errors when speaking on a one-to-one basis, especially when there is competing background noise or speech
- Difficulty understanding information when speakers talk rapidly
- Difficulty understanding information when not devoting one's complete attention to the listening task
- Difficulty with unfamiliar discussion topics

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- Difficulty performing or remembering several verbal tasks in a row
- Exhibiting weak phonemic systems (speech sound memories used in phonics, reading, and spelling)
- Often appearing as though not hearing well
- Frequently saying “What?” or “Huh?” in response to questions
- Not always being intimately in touch with the sounds in the environment, hence not always grasping exactly what has been said
- Having a history of middle ear infection
- Have lower academic performance
- Needing more time to process information
- Having difficulties with reading comprehension, vocabulary, and spelling
- Displaying behavior problems

### **3.3.2.2 *Dyscalculia***

According to the national center for learning disabilities (NCLD, 2010), *Dyscalculia* is a term referring to a wide range of life-long learning disabilities, involving math. These disabilities affect a person’s ability to understand or manipulate numbers, perform mathematical operations, and/or conceptualize numbers themselves as an abstract concept of comparative quantities. Diagnostic symptoms of dyscalculia include difficulties with the following tasks:

- Organizing problems on the page, keeping numbers lined up, following through on long division problems
- Putting language to math processes
- Understanding and doing word problems
- Keeping score or remembering how to keep score in games such as bowling
- Remembering dance step sequences or rules for playing sports
- Sight-reading music, learning fingering to play an instrument, etc.
- Abstract concepts of time and direction
- Grasping and remembering math concepts rules, formulas, and sequences (order of operations) and basic addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division facts

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- Recalling schedules and sequences of past or future events
- Strategic planning for games such as chess
- Being on time
- Mentally figuring change due back or the amounts to pay for tips, taxes, etc.
- Maintaining a sense of direction
- Grasping concepts of formal music education
- Understanding money and cash transactions
- Athletic coordination (e.g., keeping up with rapidly changing physical directions as in aerobic, dance, and exercise classes)
- Recalling dates or addresses
- Visualizing or picturing the location of the numbers on the face of a clock or the geographical locations of states, countries, oceans, streets, etc.
- Long-term memory (retention and retrieval) of concepts (e.g., being able to perform math operations one day but drawing a blank the next)
- Retaining a memory of the “layout” of things (e.g., getting lost or disoriented easily)

### **3.3.2.3 *Dysgraphia (writing disorders)***

Pierangelo and Giuliani (2008) describe *dysgraphia* as a neurological disorder that it is characterized by writing disabilities. Specifically, the disorder causes a person’s writing to be distorted or malformed. With children, the disorder generally emerges when they are introduced to writing. They make inappropriately sized and spaced letters or write wrong or misspelled words, despite thorough instruction. Joanna Nijakowska (2010) suggests that students with writing dysfunction tend to demonstrate the following symptoms:

- Generally illegible writing (despite appropriate time and attention given the task)
- Inconsistencies: mixtures of print and cursive or upper- and lowercase letters or irregular sizes, shapes, or slants of letters
- Unfinished words or letters; omitted words
- Inconsistent position on page with respect to lines and margins
- Inconsistent spaces between words and letters

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- Cramped or unusual grip, especially the following:
  - Holding the writing instrument very close to the paper
  - Holding thumb over two fingers and writing from the wrist
  - Strange wrist, body, or paper position
- Talking to self while writing or carefully watching the hand that is writing
- Slow or labored copying or writing, even if the result is neat and legible
- Content that does not reflect the student's other language skills
- Combination of fine-motor difficulty, inability to revisualize letters, and inability to remember the motor patterns involved with writing

Many students struggle to produce neat, expressive written work, whether or not they have accompanying physical or cognitive difficulties. They may learn much less from an assignment because they must focus on writing mechanism instead of content. After spending more time on an assignment than their peers, these students understand the material less. Not surprisingly, belief in their ability to learn suffers greatly.

### 3.3.2.4 *Dyslexia (reading disorder)*

Dyslexia is the learning disability associated with the individual's ability to read. The national center for learning disabilities (NCLD, 2009b) provides the following definition for dyslexia:

*As with other learning disabilities, dyslexia is a lifelong challenge that people are born with. This language processing disorder can hinder reading, writing, spelling, and sometimes even speaking. Dyslexia is not a sign of poor intelligence or laziness. It is also not the result of impaired vision. Children and adults with dyslexia simply have a neurological disorder that causes their brains to process and interpret information differently. (NCLD, 2009b)*

The occurrence of dyslexia is neither bounded to a particular socio-economic environment nor ethnic-oriented, and the nature and severity effects caused by dyslexia may vary idiosyncratically. However, Joanna Nijakowska (2010) drew an outline of the most frequent symptoms:

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- Has trouble learning the alphabet, rhyming words, or connecting letters to their sounds
- Makes many mistakes when reading aloud and repeats and pauses often
- Does not understand what is read
- Has exceptional difficulty with spelling
- Learns language late and has a limited vocabulary
- Has trouble remembering the sounds that letters make or hearing slight differences between words
- Has trouble understanding jokes, comic strips, and sarcasm
- Has trouble following directions
- Mispronounces words or uses a wrong word that sounds similar
- Has trouble organizing what he or she wants to say or cannot think of the word needed for writing or conversation
- Does not follow the social rules of conversation, such as taking turns, and may stand too close to the listener
- Confuses math symbols and misreads numbers
- Cannot retell a story in order (what happened first, second, third)
- Does not know where to begin a task or how to go on from there

### ***3.3.2.5 Dysorthographia:***

*Dysorthographia* is the learning disability that defects individuals' spelling abilities (the ability to use letters to formulate words according to their accepted usage). Many educators regard spelling as equally important learning ability as that of reading and calculating. Pierangelo and Giuliani (2008) argue that being a poor speller does not necessarily indicate a learning disability, unless this weakness is present along with reading and/or arithmetic problems. Nonetheless, the following are a number of diagnostic symptoms that are often exhibited by individuals with dysorthographia:

- Addition of unneeded letters
- Omission of needed letters
- Reversals of vowels

- Reversals of syllables
- Phonemic spelling of nonphonemic words
- Difficulty in understanding the correspondence between sounds and letters.  
(Pierangelo and Giuliani, 2008. P, 46)

### 3.3.2.6 *Nonverbal Learning Disabilities (NLD)*

Nonverbal learning disorder, also known as NLD, is a neurophysiological disorder originating in the right hemisphere of the brain. Reception of nonverbal or performance-based information governed by this hemisphere is impaired in varying degrees, resulting in problems that include the visual-spatial, intuitive, organizational, evaluative, and holistic processing functions (Horowitz, 2006). Pierangelo and Giuliani (2008) accumulated the following characteristics as being indicators of nonverbal learning disorder:

- Deficits in the areas of nonverbal problem solving, concept formation, or hypothesis testing
- Difficulty dealing with negative feedback in novel or complex situations
- Difficulties in dealing with cause-effect relationships
- Difficulties in the appreciation of incongruities
- Well-developed rote verbal capacities and rote verbal memory skills
- Overreliance on prosaic rote, and consequently inappropriate, behaviors in unfamiliar situations
- Relative deficiencies in mechanical arithmetic as compared to proficiencies in reading (word recognition) and spelling
- Rote and repetitive verbosity
- Content disorders of language
- Poor psycholinguistic pragmatics (cocktail party speech)
- Poor speech prosody
- Reliance on language for social relating, information gathering, and relief from anxiety
- Misspelling almost exclusively of the phonetically accurate variety

- Significant deficits in social perception, social judgment, and social interaction skills
- Marked tendency for social withdrawal and isolation as age increases
- High risk for social-emotional disturbance if no appropriate intervention is undertaken. (p.75)

### 3.3.2.7 *Organizational Learning Disorders*

As the name suggests, children with organizational learning disorders manifest a complete lack of organization or planning skills. This category of children requires constant support in *organizing, arranging, setting priorities, and establishing time management* when it comes to school tasks. This was expressed thoroughly by Pierangelo and Giuliani (2008) demonstration of the complications that accompany organizational learning disorders.

- Temporal-sequential disorganization
- Allocating and estimating time
- Following schedules
- Meeting deadlines
- Solving problems in stages
- Material-spatial organization
- Keeping track of possessions
- Maintaining notebooks
- Arranging desks
- Finding objects like pencils and books
- Settling down and functioning effectively when expectations or settings change
- Remembering what is required to do

### 3.3.2.8 *Social Cue Disorder*

Pierangelo and Giuliani (2008) reckon that Individuals with social cue disorder have difficulties in behaving in an *automatic* way. This is a problem with the self-governing part of the brain that stops one from doing such things as laughing at the wrong time, talking aloud to oneself, or coughing without covering the mouth. Students with this disorder might abruptly interrupt a conversation or talk aloud to themselves in

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public (p. 49). Linguistically speaking, these individuals fail to pragmatically decode implications, due to the lack of social-norms awareness. The American learning disabilities association (LDA, 2005) recognizes the following distinguishing features:

- Inability to read facial expressions or body language (kinesis)
- Misinterpreting the use and meaning of pitch (vocalics)
- Misunderstanding the use of personal space (proxemics)
- Inability to interpret environment and social cues
- Poor judgment; little thought about logical consequences
- Poor impulse control
- Need for immediate satisfaction
- Inability to set realistic priorities and goals
- Inappropriate conclusions due to deficient reasoning ability
- Illogical reasons for actions
- Inability to develop meaningful relationships with others
- Immature and “bossy” behavior
- Low frustration tolerance, resulting in disruptive behavior

### ***3.3.2.9 Visual Processing Disorders***

Visual processing, aka Perceptual, disorders refer to the condition where students are unable of perceive/process effectively whatever visual input. According to the national center for learning disabilities (2009c), this sort of disability is not to be associated with the individual physical attributes, i.e., sight or vision sharpness. Visual processing impairments are usually caused by the brain’s inability to process visual information. Furthermore, the NCLD presents some of the ramifications that can be caused by visual disorders:

- Misunderstanding or confusing written symbols (e.g., +, ×, /, &)
- Being easily distracted, especially by competing visual information
- Writing within margins or on lines or misaligning numbers in math problems
- Misjudging distances (e.g., bumping into things or placing objects too close to an edge)

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- Exhibiting a lack of fluidity of movement (e.g., not getting out of the way of a moving ball or knocking things over)
- Not differentiating colors or similarly shaped letters and numbers (e.g., *b* and *d*, *p* and *q*, *6* and *9*, or *2* and *5*)
- Fail organizing and solving math problems
- Difficulties in finding and retaining important information in reading assignments or tests
- Unable to write coherently, or produce well-organized essays
- Problems copying from board or books
- Virtually impossible to do sewing or other types of fine-motor activities
- Writing neatly and quickly proven rather challenging
- Incapable of reading with speed and precision. (“Visual Processing Disorders”, 2009)

### ***Conclusion***

The study that underlined investigating the credentials for the premise that mild disabilities are a possibly one of the adversary factors that are generating some negative influence on the level of performance delivered by EFL learners has, in this chapter, painted a comprehensive outline of the main diagnostic symptoms of the three chief categories of mild disability.

Nevertheless, this is to be considered nothing but a preparatory phase for initiating a field investigation of those hypothesized effects. It is essential to have established a clear understanding of the different categories symptoms and sub-categorical disabilities, each category enfolds, yet this can only be a mere portion of what symptoms mild disabilities really have. On another basis, this close up in chapter III is made to provide a clear perspective of what can be witnessed, still, from the challenges that students with undiagnosed mild disabilities have to struggle with.

The study is thusly aiming to disprove those negative attitudes teachers tend to have about students with constant low performance levels, accusing them of “hopelessness”, laziness, or lack of “what is needed”. It is the duty of every teacher to scrutinize his every act because students are always looking forward with great ecstasy to their teachers’ high expectancy supporting feedbacks. It is common of teachers, even those with experience, to fail elevating the performance of some of their students despite their eagerness to learn the language, and this where mild disabilities can fill the theoretical void of “why”.

Utilizing earlier presented facts about mild disabilities to a good effect, the following chapter (IV) is set up to measure the validity of the hypothesis suggesting that the poor performance of some EFL learners is due to them having a mild disability, of kind, hurdling their academic progress in learning English as foreign language.

## ***Chapter 4: Field Work***

### **4.1 The Population and Sampling**

### **4.2 Research Methodology**

### **4.3 Description of the two questionnaires**

#### **4.3.1 Questionnaire I: for students**

#### **4.3.2 Questionnaire 2: for teachers**

### **4.4 The Administration of the Questionnaires**

### **4.5 The Demonstration and Discussion of the Findings**

#### **4.5.1 Questionnaire I: for students**

#### **4.5.2 Questionnaire II: for teachers**

### **4.6 Recapitulation and interpretation of the main findings**

## ***4 Field Work***

### ***Introduction:***

In an educational system, where there is little recognition, if any, of those uneasy-to-detect deficits, an inquiry about mild disabilities can be described as a “wild shot far off success”. However, this research attempts to raise awareness of teachers, first, and then, hopefully, those education “higher-ups” (officials) who are supposedly responsible for improving the learning conditions for all children (poor, rich, smart, slow...). After having dealt with a basic description of the characteristics of and instructional philosophies for mildly disabled students, the research will attempt to provide further evidence for the effects caused by mild disabilities; numerically, on the level of learning of English as a foreign language.

The nature of the conducted investigation, thus gauging the prevalence and the influences of MDs, dictates that a fairly large study is needed. Consequently, the research devoted a couple of questionnaires for that matter, one targeting middle school students, and the other is for EFL middle school teachers. The first questionnaire comprised a set of 18 questions, questions about the students’ personal background, and the potential causes of their lack of performance in EFL classroom, the other questionnaire (for teachers) directed 17 questions for teachers whose experience can provide further insights to a genuine description of the circumstances surrounding their students’ weak performance, hence deciding the involvement of mild disabilities.

As for the population, the study maintained a narrow scope of study, in investigating the effects caused by mild disabilities on the level of learning English as foreign language in middle schools. Subsequently, the chosen sample consisted of 60 second middle school graders, and 6 of their respective EFL teachers. The 60 students were, in fact, selected from two different schools, two classes with 30 students each. As for teachers, the 6 samples are from four different middle schools.

This chapter is devoted for exhibiting the findings gathered from both questionnaires, along with analysis of the attained data. In other words, this section of the study is set to gauge and determine both the effects and prevalence of mild disabilities amidst middle school learners, and whether the extension of these learning impairments influences the level of performance in English as a foreign language classes.

#### ***4.1 The Population and Sampling***

The study is designed to maintain a narrow scope of investigation that exclusively regards Middle-school EFL learners as its targeted population; namely, all Middle-school students of the Wilaya of M'sila. However, for considerations of time, effort, and accessibility of information, the inquiry has examined a mere portion of the population that is 60 middle school second graders from two of Berhoum's four Middle-schools (Salhi Abdelazize and Eastern Entrance middle schools, class 2M5 and class 2M1, respectively), and this sort of procedure is often called *convenience sampling*. There are several reasons for selecting this sampling, and they can be enlisted as follows:

- ❖ Middle-school represents the first educational phase in which youngsters are exposed to EFL for the first time, and since students with MDs are estimated to have stronger tendency to drop out of school, particularly when there is no proper aid. Therefore, Middle-schools have the most suitable environment for observing the effect of MDs on learning English as a foreign language.
- ❖ The novelty of EFL to middle-school first graders course can interfere with the accuracy of any designation made about the phenomenon, raising questions about whether the source of the problem is the difficulty of the course itself or a psychological deficit.
- ❖ Since Middle school second graders can be more comfortable learning EFL, basing this study results on this sample will ensure a greater data-precision.

As for the second part, or the second questionnaire, of the field study, a selection of 6 teachers from four different middle schools was made to try and provide clearer views of the characteristics of students with weak EFL level of performance. Furthermore, the experience and familiarity that teachers have about the different conditions and types of students can help determine if there is an actual adversative

impact caused by mild disabilities, in terms of learning English as a foreign language, through their testimony about the existence of some common symptoms mildly disabled students tend to demonstrate.

#### **4.2 Research Methodology:**

Since the study is seeking to expose the nature of relation between students' mild disabilities and their weak performance in learning EFL, it is quite plausible to utilize a descriptive approach for that matter, given that most of the study's data will be of a quantitative nature, thus requiring a descriptive analysis; because according to J.W. Best (1970), a descriptive research is primarily designed for studying:

*Conditions or relationships that exist; practices that prevail; beliefs, points of views, or attitudes that are held; processes that are going on; effects that are being felt; or trends that are developing. At times, descriptive research is concerned with how what is or what exists is related to some preceding event that has influenced or affected a present condition or event. (As quoted in Cohen, Manion, & Morrison., 2007, p. 205)*

#### **4.3 Description of the two questionnaires**

In order to formulate a multi-perspective diagnostic report of the current status of students performance in EFL classes; and the relationship between weak performance and mild disabilities, the research set up questionnaires for both EFL teachers (6 teachers) and EFL learners (60 learners).

##### **4.3.1 Questionnaire I: for students**

The first questionnaire comprised a set of 18 questions, presented in students' native language, that is Arabic, because of their limited proficiency in English language, and so they can freely negotiate such abstract notions. Moreover, the questionnaire was divided into two sections, background questions and other weak performance analytic questions. Given the fact that mild disabilities are frequently described as being the result of either biological or environmental causes (Henley, Ramsey, & Algozzine, 2009), knowledge of the medical and family background is essential to verify such associations. The first set was composed to help gaining familiarity with those medical, environmental conditions, through a number of six interrogations.

The other section of the questionnaire can be described as a set of diagnostic questions, 12 questions, aiming at identifying the possible causes for students' misachievement in EFL and verifying the *potential involvement of mild disabilities*. At first, the second and the third questions were decided to measure *the influence of motivation and attitudes* toward learning English as a foreign language on the level of achievement and performance learners demonstrate. The following questions were designed to try and locate some of the environmental and pedagogical symptoms mildly disabled students tend to demonstrate. Up to the tenth and eleventh questions, the attention was shifted toward, first, the availability of proper educational help for those EFL low performing students, and then polling students' attitudes toward receiving specialized assistance for helping them overcome their EFL learning challenges. Finally, question number 12 is actually composed of two exercises taken from an English language learning aptitude test for Arabic language users (Dadour, 2008). After all, relying on students' testaments for designating learning dysfunction cannot be sufficient. Talking about further insight into low performing students' characteristics, teachers are about the only ones to describe it properly, for that they can be both accurate and objective, at least more than students, in their descriptions due to their daily experience with this category of EFL underachievers.

### **4.3.2 Questionnaire 2: for teachers**

It has been previously mentioned that exclusively relying on the data attained from students responses cannot be credited as fully accurate nor be considered as a comprehensive reflection to the phenomenon where mild disabilities interfere with the educational performance of individuals. Ergo, the involvement of a third objective party is vital for increasing the accuracy and credibility of the results. This objective third is present in the views and opinions of EFL teachers whose knowledge and experience deliver a more accurate statement of the actual effects ensued by mild deficiencies in students' intellectual or behavioral mechanisms.

The questionnaire compiles a set of total 17 questions, divided into two main sections. The first set (I. 1, 2, 3) is about gaining a certain degree of familiarity with the *professional background* of the responding teacher, that academic level, experience in

teaching English as a foreign language, and the existence of any previous experience teaching students with special needs (mental or physical). As for the second partition, a shift of intentions was made toward inquiring about the *effects and existence of mild disabilities* in EFL low performance situations. Initially (question II. 1), teachers are questioned about their familiarity about the concept of mild disability. Furthermore, the following questions sought confirmation about the existence of some of the major symptoms that are common amongst students with emotional disturbance, intellectual disability, and specific learning disabilities. Finally, teachers are asked about psych-pedagogical matters, such as their involvement in pedagogical informative seminars about the effects and characteristics of learning deficiencies, the availability of psychological counseling, and their attitudes toward paraeducators involvement.

#### ***4.4 The Administration of the Questionnaires:***

Given the fact that questionnaire has set middle school second graders as its targeted correspondents, restlessness and hustle was much expected. However, personal observation has proven that using Arabic as the referential language for questions made it easier for students to comprehend the content of the questionnaire with, and thus delivering more efficient responses. The questionnaires were distributed to 60 middle school second grade students, each 30 students were from a different school (Salhi Abdelazize and Eastern Entrance middle schools), under supervision from the teacher in charge. However, class 2M5 (Salhi Abdelazize) was far noisier and disturbing than the second class, 2M1 (Eastern Entrance), yet both sets of students soon settled to undergo the questionnaire. The questionnaire was conducted in a relatively short time span, about 10/15 minutes, and to ensure a high rate of question answering, a “step-by-step procedure was followed where questions were explained to the whole class and then answered each at a time. As a result, all students were able to complete the given questions with slight confusion among some students on the level of two-step questions (e.g., I. 5, 6).

Concerning the second questionnaire, some teachers were reluctant to offer assistance, not before keen persuasion at least. One of the sample teachers draw blank the I.12, for that it demands a theoretical answering on behalf of the respondent. On the other hand, the other majority of teachers were quite enchanted by the idea, which apparently

provided them with some sort of plausible explanation to some of their students' unordinary behavior and lack of achievement in English as a foreign language module.

**4.5 The Demonstration and Discussion of the Findings:**

**4.5.1 Questionnaire I: for students.**

Since the study is far more concerned with what factors contributing to students failure in English as a foreign language classes, the attained questionnaire responses will be represented in two categories, that of successful EFL learners, and their underachieving counterparts. In other words, the analysis will take a form of comparison between the traits and characteristics of those good performing students-with grades greater than 11- and those poor performing students-with grades less than 11 because at such sensitive early stages of EFL learning, students need to develop a solid basic knowledge of the language, and grades less than eleven do not reflect that. For purposes of objectivity and increase in credibility, the analyses will draw a distinction between the results attained form class 2M1 and 2M5, so a control over the human factor can be gained (i.e., teachers and students), particularly when the two classes are from the same population.

**4.5.1.1 Background Information**

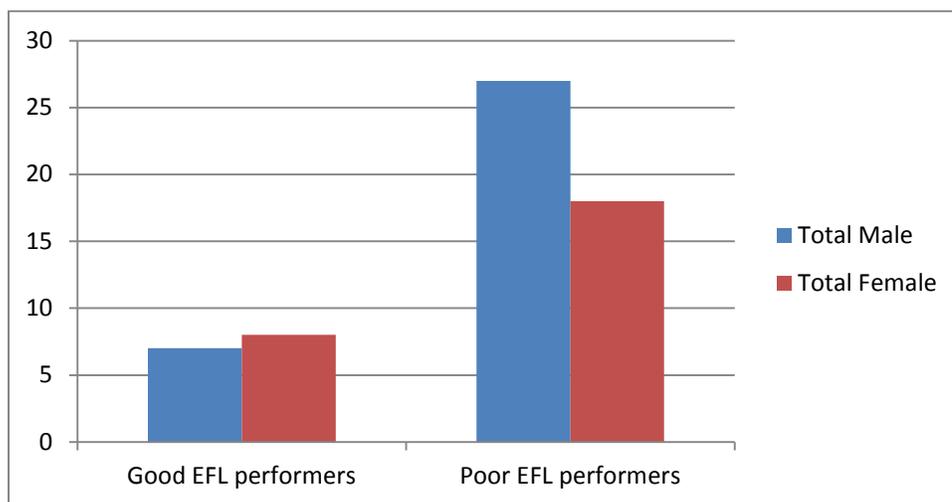
**1. Gender indication:**

The first question is to defy the urban myth that male students are by default failed students.

Options	2M1				2M5				Total			
	Good performers		Weak performers		Good performers		Weak performers		Good Performers		Weak performers	
	N#	%										
<b>Male</b>	2	25.00%	13	59.09%	5	71.43%	14	60.87%	7.	46.67%	27	60.00%
<b>Female</b>	6	75.00%	9	40.91%	2	28.57%	9	39.13%	8	53.33%	18	40.00%
<b>Total</b>	8	100%	22	100%	7	100%	23	100%	15	100%	45	100%

**Table 4.1:** gender and performance in English as a foreign language

It has become quite a belief amongst some EFL teachers that male students are not “cut” for foreign language learning. Scientifically speaking, there must be some genetic properties supporting such claims. However, the research findings prove that male learners are just as capable as their female peers of producing good performances in EFL module. More precisely, 46.57 percent of the total 15 good performing population are male students; such percentage can only deny those fault prejudgments teachers usually have about male learners. Furthermore, the findings have proven that male students can be more efficient in learning EFL than their female colleagues, demonstrated in the results attained from 2M5 class where 71.34 percent of the better performers were male students; vice versa, female students have shown that they can outperform their male peers as well, 75% of the good performances in 2M1.



**Figure 4.1:** the relation between gender and level of performance in EFL module

On the other hand, figure 4.1 indicates that bad performances cannot be considered entirely as a “*masculine matter*”, at least, not to the extent that genetic gender traits can be associated with bad performance in EFL learning. This was supported by the high scored percentage of failing EFL performing students on both ends; out of the 45 weak performers, a percentage of 60% males and 40% females were calculated. As to the genetic relevance of the matter, the change in environment resulted of similar results, reflected in how the percentage of bad performance in 2M1 was confined into a percentage of 59.09% of male students and 40.91% of female students. Similarly, 2M5 bad performers consisted of 60.87% males and 39.13% females. Finally, a conclusion is

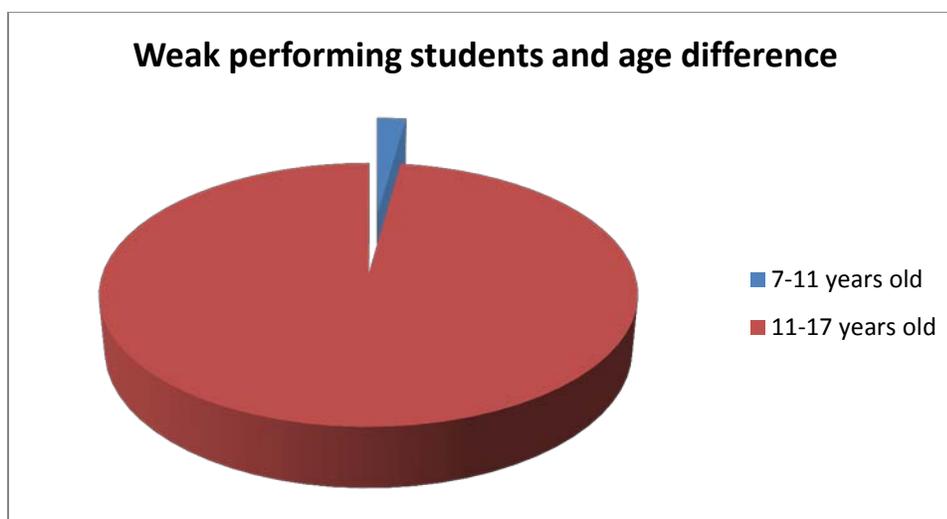
drawn about how that bad performance in EFL module is not gender-genetic related, and that implies that other environmental and biological factors can be in control, such as the proposed effects of mild disabilities.

**2. Age category indication:**

According to Jean Piaget’s (1950) developmental theory of the human cognitive abilities, children acquire full control over their cognitive abilities, including their linguistic abilities as well, over the age of 11, substituting their concrete perception, the concrete-operational stage (7 to 11 years old), with a more philosophical, abstract based reasoning with a greater potential of creativity and problem solving ability. In relation to the study, cognitive maturity means that learners are fully capable of theoretical processing of received inputs (not only of linguistic nature but in other modules as well).

Options /Age	2M1				2M5				Total			
	Good performers		Weak Performers		good performers		Weak Performers s		Good Performers		Weak Performers	
	N#	%	N#	%	N#	%	N#	%	N#	%	N#	%
<b>7-11</b>	0	0%	1	4.55%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	2.27%
<b>11-17</b>	8	100%	21	95.45%	7	100%	23	100%	15	100%	44	97.78%
<b>total</b>	8	100%	22	100%	7	100%	23	100%	15	100%	45	100.06%

*Table 4.2: Age difference and Performance in EFL*



*Figure 4.2: Weak Performance and Age Difference*

According to table 4.2, the questionnaire resulted of diagnosing a single case, 2.27%, of students under 11 years old. The diagnosed case was associated with the weak performing category of students, which can be explained in terms of the learner encountering a certain level of difficulty constructing abstract understanding of the provided instructional input. Nonetheless, the major concern is about how that 97.78% of the underachieving population are supposedly cognitively mature, since they are 11 years old or older. These presented results indicate that there is little effect, if any, caused by age difference on the level of learning English as a foreign language. One can propose two probable explanations for that happening. First, the student’s surrounding (domestic, socio-economic...) may occupy a major role in determining his/her overall performance in learning EFL. Forward, there is the suggestion that some students may, for some reason, have a lag or *retardation* in the *development of their cognitive abilities*, and that what will be discussed in the coming questions.

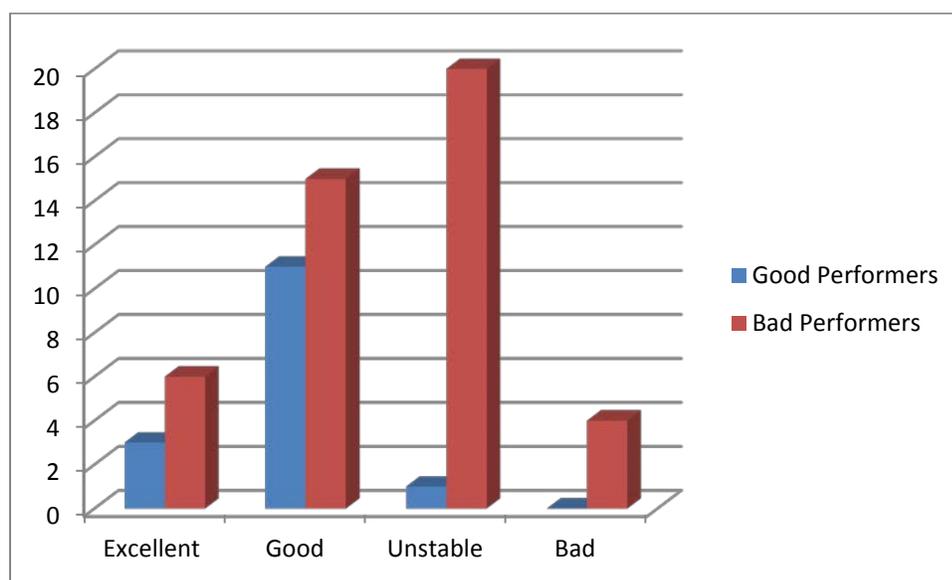
**3. Family Economic Status**

Henley, Ramsey, and Algozzine (2009), all three, propose family economic conditions as one of the major environmental causes of mild disabilities because families with limited financial means fail to provide proper nutrition, medical care, or healthy living environment for their students, so children are expected to suffer from biological development delays, including neurological development delays. Beside biological impairments, students may pay little attention to their educational life, as they might have to fend for themselves at an early age.

Options	2M1				2M5				Total			
	Good performers		Weak Performers		good performers		Weak Performers		Good Performers		Weak Performers	
	N#	%										
<b>Excellent</b>	0	0%	1	4.55%	3	42.86%	5	22%	3	20%	6	13.33%
<b>Good</b>	7	87.50%	8	36.36%	4	57.14%	7	30.43%	11	73.33%	15	33.33%
<b>Unstable</b>	1	12.50%	12	54.55%	0	0%	8	34.78%	1	6.67%	20	44.44%
<b>Bad</b>	0	0%	1	4.55%	0	0%	3	13.04%	0	0%	4	8.89%
<b>Total</b>	8	100%	22	100%	7	100%	23	100%	15	100%	45	100%

*Table 4.3: the effects of economic conditions on learning foreign languages*

It has been aforementioned that bad economic conditions can have devastating effects on children’s biological and cognitive development, also on their behaviors and attitudes toward learning, and that what might result in deteriorating the level of educational achievement of most students coming from families with limited financial means. The data represented in the table 4.3 provides just the evidence for these claims, in which can be remarked that there is significant difference between the economic status of good performing students (only a single student, 6.67%, having unstable family economic conditions was able to perform well in EFL module) and that of weak performers; out of 45 underachieving students, 24 students had poor economic conditions, between unstable 44.44% and utterly bad 6.76%.



**Figure 4.3:** *the effects of economic conditions on EFL performance*

These demonstrated outcomes (figure 4.3) can only be interpreted in terms of that bad environmental conditions (such as poverty) can have some dreadful impacts on students’ performance in EFL module. Having these high rates of poor economic conditions (51.2% of poor achievers) associated with EFL weak performance provides solid ground for the hypothesis about the interference caused by mild disabilities; even though, poor performance can be the result of students engagement in “*learning-unsupportive circumstances*” such as poverty.

However, we can remark that there is a significant amount of students who despite their good economic condition, 46.66% of 45 underachievers (13.33% with excellent financial conditions and 33.33% percent with good finances) still produce weak performances in EFL module. This late remark can draw a number of conclusions, including the one with students having unrevealed learning disabilities preventing them from achieving a good level of performance in the act of learning English as a foreign language.

**4. Marriage status of the parents:**

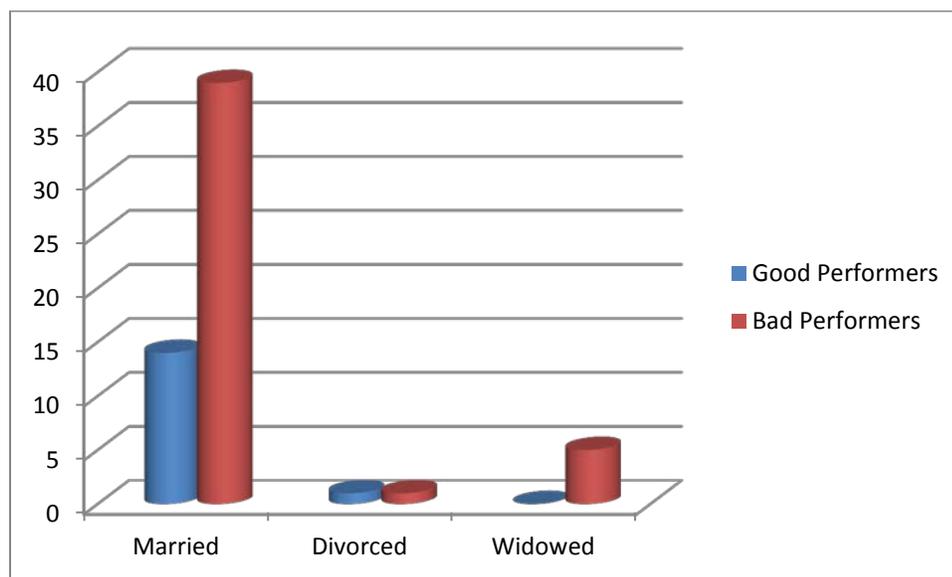
We have learned that economic conditions of the family are not the sole environmental factor responsible for some students’ underperformance in EFL classes. Ergo, assumptions were raised about what other domestic elements can be accomplices to poverty, and since *single parenting* is regarded as a prominent cause for emotional disturbances, with the children amidst those marriage conflicts, causing them to escape from reality either by withdrawn or defying anyone resembling those lost ties they used to have.

Options	2M1				2M5				Total			
	Good performers		Weak Performers		good performers		Weak Performers		Good Performers		Weak Performers	
	N#	%	N#	%	N#	%	N#	%	N#	%	N#	%
<b>Married</b>	7	87.50%	19	86.36%	7	100%	20	86.96%	14	93.33%	39	86.67%
<b>Divorced</b>	1	12.50%	0	0%	0	0%	1	4.35%	1	6.67%	1	2.22%
<b>Widowed</b>	0	0%	3	13.64%	0	0%	2	8.70%	0	0.00%	5	11.11%
<b>Total</b>	8	100%	22	100%	7	100%	23	100%	15	100%	45	100%

**Table 4.4:** the effects of parents’ marriage status on EFL learning performance

According to the data represented in the table 4.4, five cases of single-parenting can be designated (2 cases of divorce and other 5 cases of orphaned students). In terms of level of achievement in EFL module, there was a single student with divorced parents, who succeeded to have a good level of performance in EFL, yet this case is apparently an exception to the rule because the other 6 cases have failed to have good performances in

EFL classes. It is a plausible explanation that these students are suffering from depression, isolation, or other forms of emotional anomalies, seizing them of devoting the required attention for ensuring a good level of achievement in learning English as a foreign language.



**Figure 3.4:** *the effects of marriage status on the EFL performance*

Nonetheless, the other 93.33 percent of underachievers come from families with married couples, so what are the true causes of their lack of performance? It should be considered that even with the presence of both parents, children can still develop learning disabilities, with the possibility of genetic disorders, environmental hazards, or domestic abuse caused by parents themselves.

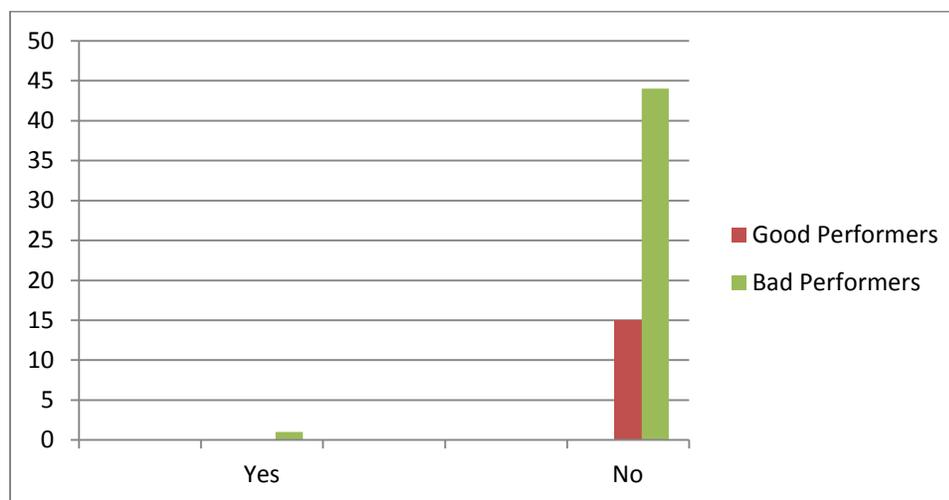
**5. Have you been previously diagnosed with as disability? (6) If you answered by yes, what is the nature of disability: physical, mental, or other form of disability?**

The purpose from this two steps question is to gain knowledge about the medical history of the students, so determining if some students if some students underachievement is the result of some preexisting mental or physical impairments. Since the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> questions are integrated, and answers to the sixth are constrained by the positive answering (yes) of the fifth, there will be a joined demonstration to the results of both questions.

Options		Total			
		Good Performers		Weak Performers	
		N#	%	N#	%
Yes	Physical	0	0.00%	1	2.22%
	Mental	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
	Others	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
No		15	100.00%	44	97.78%
Total		15	100.00%	45	100.00%

**Table 4.5:** the existence of pre-diagnosed disabilities amongst students of EFL

According to table 4.5, there is only one case of pre-diagnosed disabilities, which is physical in nature-it was a weak hearing impairment-, and less surprisingly, the student was labeled as an EFL weak performer, particularly with the nature of his disability-weak hearing- that constrains his reception of the provided English as foreign language teaching input.



**Figure 4.5** the existence of pre-diagnosed disabilities amongst students of EFL

Despite not being designated by a particular impairment, 44 students (97.78 percent of the underachieving category) have yet been categorized as weak performers, and that raises concerns about whether there are other *difficult-to-detect* disabilities affecting students aptitude for learning English as a foreign language, so is there evidence about the existence of disabilities of such sort.

**4.5.1.2 Questions for detecting the potential existence of mild disabilities:**

**1. How can you characterize your grades in EFL module?**

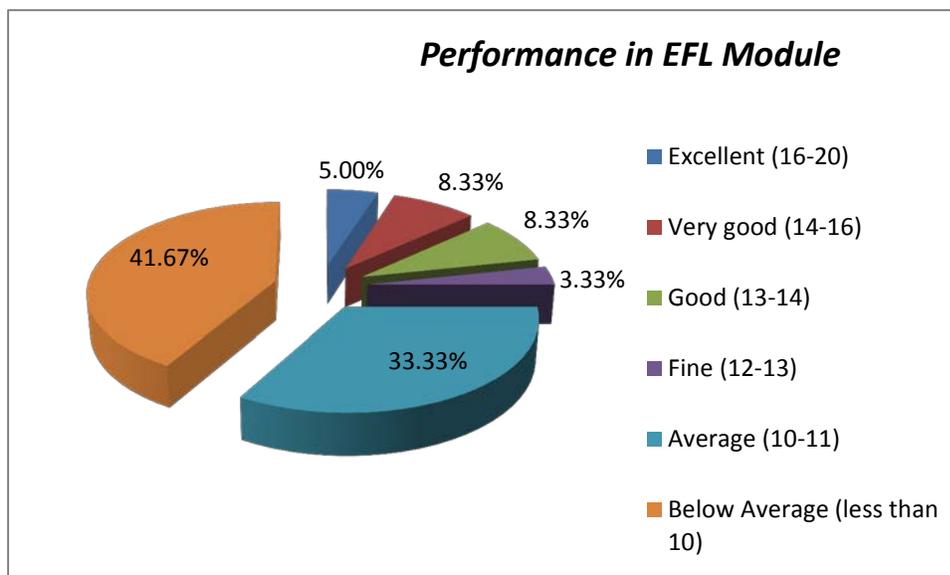
This question was used to collect information about the correspondents’ level of performance in EFL learning. It should be mentioned, as well, that the answers to this particular question have been associated with all of the previous analysis of the other first six questions, as it will keep being involved in the remaining of the questions analysis. The reason for that is the answers were used to classify students into two groups of good EFL performers and weak EFL performers. It was mentioned earlier that students with average and below average marks were considered as underachievers, given the easiness and simplicity EFL teaching input tend to be at this level, second grade of middle school. Students were requested to categorize their grades in six options provided: excellent (16-20), very good (14-16), good (13-14), fine (12-13), average (10-11), or below average (less than 10).

<i>Options</i>	2M1		2M5		Total	
	N#	%	N#	%	N#	%
<b>Excellent (16-20)</b>	1	3.33%	2	6.67%	3	5.00%
<b>Very good (14-16)</b>	5	16.67%	0	0.00%	5	8.33%
<b>Good (13-14)</b>	2	6.67%	3	10.00%	5	8.33%
<b>Fine (12-13)</b>	0	0%	2	6.67%	2	3.33%
<b>Average (10-11)</b>	9	30.00%	11	36.67%	20	33.33%
<b>Below Average (less than 10)</b>	13	43.33%	12	40.00%	25	41.67%
<b>Total</b>	30	100.00%	30	100.00%	60	100.00%

*Table 4.6: the performance of students in EFL module*

The obtained results are simply shocking for that 75 percent of the students have grades below 11, 41.67% of which are less than 10. This occurs in the midst of a new and supposedly more efficient language teaching syllabus. This raises quite a few questions about the real causes for some students’ constant failures in learning English as a foreign language. This pattern of weak performance can be observed in both 2M1 and 2M5,

where 73.33% of the 2M1 students can be considered as poor performers, and 76.67% of the 2M5.



**Figure 4.6:** *The performance of Students in EFL Module*

The figure 3.6 illustrates that levels of good performance are rather shallow, just 24.99% of the students scored grades higher than 12, if compared to those other rates of weak performance.

**2. How do you feel about learning English language?**

The first chapter has dealt with some previous theories about the discrepancy in learning foreign languages, and of those theories suggested that the nature of motivation and attitudes a student have toward learning the language can have significant effect on the progress to be made in acquiring the foreign language. Both the 3<sup>rd</sup> and the 2<sup>nd</sup> questions were set to investigate their effects on the performance of students in learning EFL, in which this second question verifies the nature of relationship between students' attitudes toward learning English as foreign language and their performances in EFL learning. The questionnaire uses a scale similar to that of Likert, where students express their feelings toward learning English language on a scale of five degrees.

## Field Work

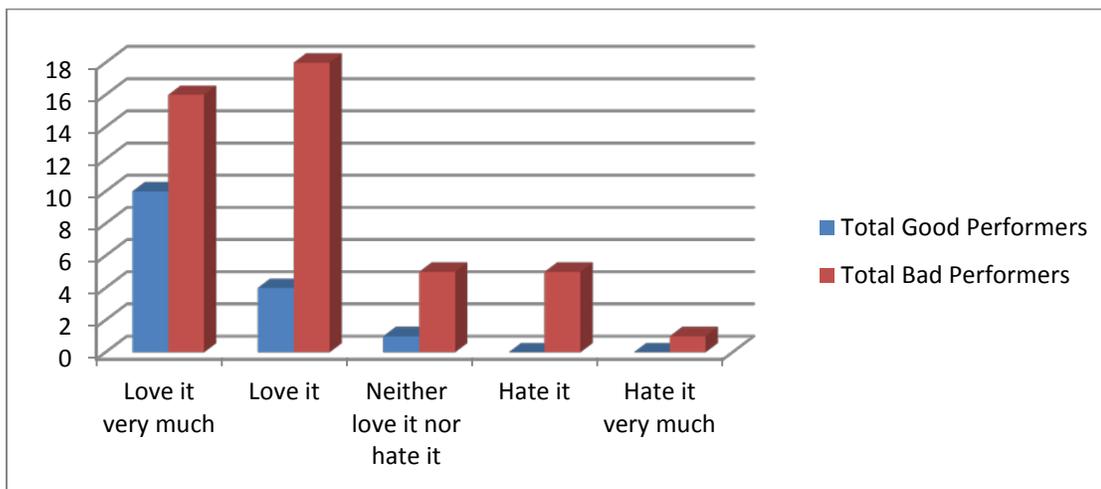
Options	2M1				2M5				Total			
	Good performers		Weak Performers		good performers		Weak Performers		Good Performers		Weak Performers	
	N#	%										
<b>Love it very much</b>	5	62.50%	6	27.27%	5	71.43%	10	43.48%	10	66.67%	16	35.56%
<b>Love it</b>	2	25.00%	10	45.45%	2	28.57%	8	34.78%	4	26.67%	18	40.00%
<b>Neither love it nor hate it</b>	1	12.50%	2	9.09%	0	0%	3	13.04%	1	6.67%	5	11.11%
<b>Hate it</b>	0	0%	3	13.64%	0	0%	2	8.70%	0	0%	5	11.11%
<b>Hate it very much</b>	0	0%	1	4.55%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	2.22%
<b>Total</b>	8	100%	22	100%	7	100%	23	100%	15	100%	45	100.00%

*Table 4.7: the effects of students' attitudes toward English language learning on their level of performance*

The demonstrated results indicate that a 93.34 percent of the good performing students have positive attitudes toward leaning EFL, where 66.76% of them said they *loved it very much* while a 26.76% said they *love it*. Nonetheless, there is a single case with neutral attitude (neither loves it, nor hates it) toward learning English among good performers (6.67%), but more remarkable is that no good performers were recorded as having negative attitudes toward EFL. Moreover, same patterns of positive attitude among good performers can be observed in both 2M1 and 2M5; 87.50% of good performers in class 2M1 state they either love it very much (66.50%) or they love it (25.00%), and another 100% of the good performing population in group 2M5 agreed that they have positive feelings for learning English as a foreign language, 71.43% of which said they love it very much whereas the remaining 28.57% said they love it.

Bad performance wise, negative attitudes toward learning English language have, as remarked in table 4.7, been remarked to have devastating effects on the level of students' achievement in EFL classes, and that was recorded in the 13.33 percent of the 45 underachieving students who expressed their *hatred* (11.11% hate it, and 2.22% who

hate very much) toward learning the English language. Nonetheless, neutral undetermined feelings have proven unsupportive for students' quest of learning English as a foreign language, either, because 11.11% of underperforming students suggested neutral feelings for learning EFL.



**Figure 4.7:** the effects of attitudes toward EFL learning on level of performance

However, these late illustrated results (Figure 4.7) clarify that even though a considerable amount of students show affection toward learning English as foreign language, still, they fail to deliver good level of performance in EFL classes, 75.56% of the underperforming students stated that they *love* (40%) or *love very much* (35.56%) learning English as foreign language. This is another sign that there is other factors involved in hindering the well performance of students, other factors such as emotional disturbances, mild/moderate intellectual retardation, or other specific learning disabilities because with such high rate of failure amongst students willing to learn English as a foreign language, it can no longer be considered as a matter of laziness or lack of interest in learning the language. The following question provides further clues to the students' true objectives for learning the English language.

**3. Motivation for learning English language:**

In this question, students were asked to specify their true intentions for learning English as foreign language, with three choices provided: a *compulsory* module, for

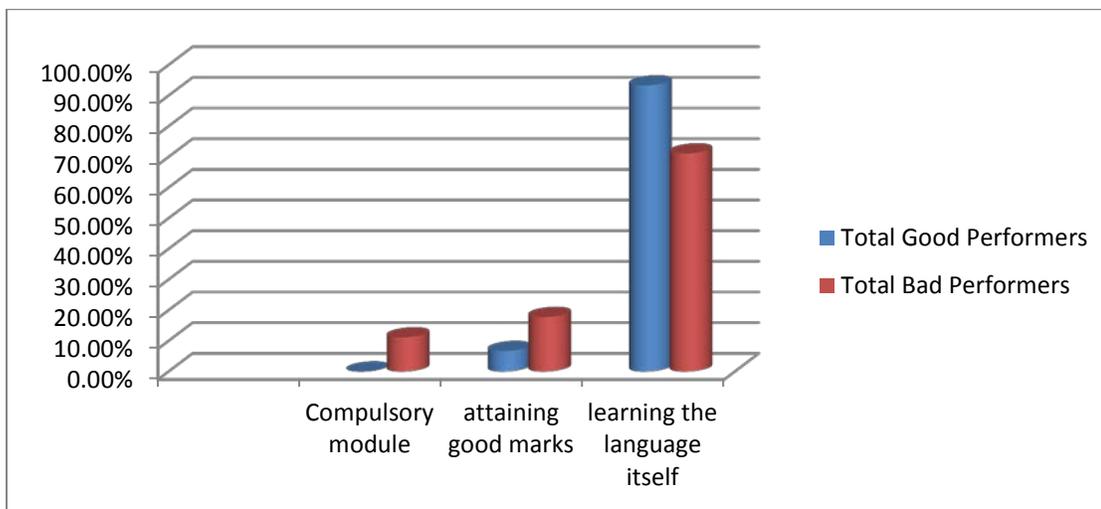
*attaining good marks, or for the want of learning the language itself.* These late mentioned choices implies three major motivational theories, the first (compulsory module) reflects a lack of motivation, and is most likely to have negative impact on learning EFL, the second describes a position of instrumental motivation where learning EFL is a means for achieving an ultimate goal (good marks), and the last one is about the integrativeness of motivation that is believed to have significant effect on the performance of foreign language learners, for that it constantly driving the individual to achieve his/her underline goal, which is learning English in this case.

<i>Options</i>	2M1				2M5				Total			
	<i>Good performers</i>		<i>Weak Performers</i>		<i>good performers</i>		<i>Weak Performers</i>		<i>Good Performers</i>		<i>Weak Performers</i>	
	N#	%	N#	%	N#	%	N#	%	N#	%	N#	%
<b>Compulsory module</b>	0	0%	3	13.64%	0	0.00%	2	8.70%	0	0.00%	5	11.11%
<b>attaining good marks</b>	1	12.50%	6	27.27%	0	0.00%	2	8.70%	1	6.67%	8	17.78%
<b>learning the language itself</b>	7	87.50%	13	59.09%	7	100%	19	82.61%	14	93.33%	32	71.11%
<b>Total</b>	8	100%	22	100%	7	100%	23	100%	15	100%	45	100%

*Table 4.8: motivation and the level of performance in EFL module*

The results show that only underachievers considered the reason for learning English as a foreign language as a compulsory module, precisely 11.11 percent of the weak performing population from both groups, 2M1 with 13.64% and 2M5 with 8.70%. This can be explained as the result of students lacking the required motivation and desire to learn the language, for that little effort is made. Instrumental motivation for learning the language has proven to create little effect on improving students' level of achievement in learning English as a foreign language, which ironically is the sole concern for this type of students. It has been-table 4.8- recorded that out of the 9 students who claimed to have attaining good marks as their top priority in learning EFL, only a single student can be considered as a good achiever.

Zoltan Dornyei (2005) argues that integrative motivation for learning the language (i.e., learning the language for the sake of mastering it) generates the required will for overcoming any potential difficulties.



**Figure 4.8:** *the nature of motivation and students performance in EFL module*

However the collected data have demonstrate that, even though, the absolute majority of good performing students (93.33%) are *integratively* motivated, for they are wanting to learn the language itself, it still can be remarked that 71.11% of the poor performing population are integratively motivated, as well.

As a conclusion, motivation cannot be considered as the sole governing factor in learning EFL that originates from the individual psychological properties, so what other factors can be said to effect students’ performance in EFL module other than motivation, attitudes, and socio-economic circumstances? This theoretical void can only be filled with the assumption that there are certain unapparent anomalies preventing learners’ proper functioning in the course of learning EFL. These concealable personal and learning deficits are known as mild disabilities, and the remaining questions will attempt to designate any sorts of clues about their existence

**4. Do you have long conversations with your parents?**

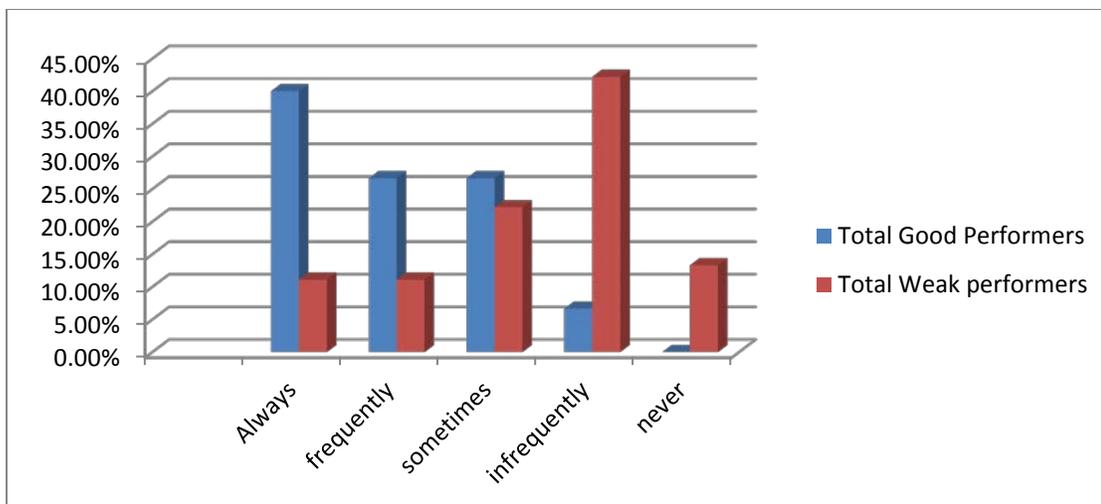
These next two questions (4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>) are designed to evaluate the students’ personal relations with both his/her family and friends because emotionally disturbed

students have a tendency to live in isolation from their friends and even family. Despite all, questions were indirect, for avoiding any sort of inconvenience or embarrassment to students. This question investigates how strong a bond there is between the student and his/her parents; it should be mentioned that inconsistent parental care is one of the primary causes of emotional void, and thus depression or other unhealthy social relations. To gauge the strength of the parent-child bond, Likert’s scale of frequency (i.e., always, frequently, sometimes, infrequently, and never) was applied.

<i>Options</i>	2M1				2M5				Total			
	<i>Good performers</i>		<i>Weak performers</i>		<i>good performers</i>		<i>Weak performers</i>		<i>Good Performers</i>		<i>Weak performers</i>	
	N#	%										
<b>Always</b>	2	25.00%	1	4.55%	4	57.14%	4	17.39%	6	40.00%	5	11.11%
<b>frequently</b>	4	50.00%	2	9.09%	0	0.00%	3	13.04%	4	26.67%	5	11.11%
<b>sometimes</b>	2	25.00%	6	27.27%	2	28.57%	4	17.39%	4	26.67%	10	22.22%
<b>Infrequently</b>	0	0%	10	45.45%	1	14.29%	9	39.13%	1	6.67%	19	42.22%
<b>never</b>	0	0%	3	13.64%	0	0.00%	3	13.04%	0	0.00%	6	13.33%
<b>Total</b>	8	100%	22	100%	7	100%	23	100%	15	100%	45	100%

*Table 4.9: the effects of parent-child relationship on the level of performance in EFL module*

According to table 4.9, the majority of good performers have strong relationships with their parents, in which a percentage of 93.34 % expressed that they are maintaining constant communication with their caregivers; always (40%), frequently (26.76%), and sometimes (26.76%), the options chosen by good performers to testify for such healthy relationship. Despite the isolated case of infrequent communication, it is safe to say that constant communication with children is a primary factor for their educational success.



**Figure 4.9:** the effects of parent-child relationship on the level of performance in EFL module

On the other hand, figure 4.9 illustrates how that more than half-55.55%- of the underperforming students have unstable communicative relationship with their parents, it has even been indicated that 13.33% percent of them have no relation what so ever with their parents, and that what can harmfully damage the personality of the child, particular at such critical age (teenage), as well as it can cause developmental lags in the intellectual development of those youngsters. It should be reckoned that the question was about the occurrence of communicative conversations between students and their parents, talking about their personal and educational life. Having such high rates of weak parent-child relationship associated with the weak level of performance in EFL module, one can only deduce that there is a high possibility that some of these students have already developed an emotional disorder as a result, either by entering a phase of solitude or manifesting frequent aggressive behavior.

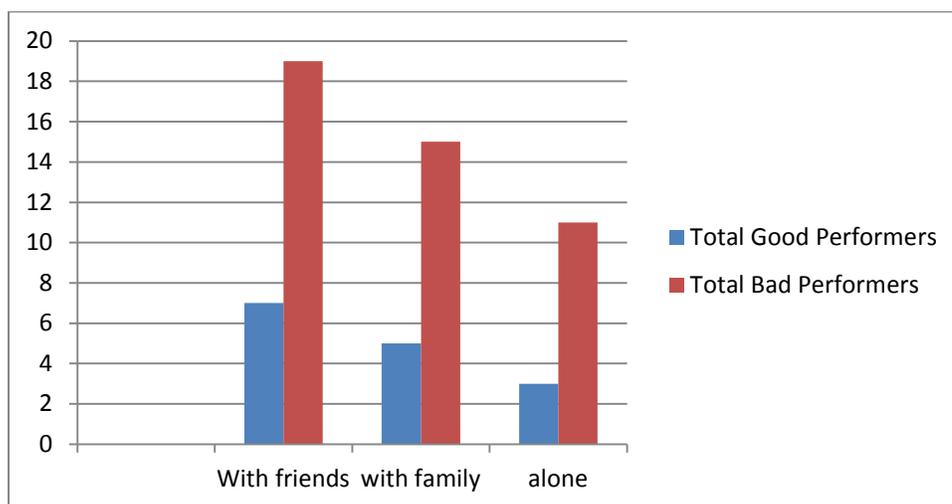
##### **5. How do you spend your spare time?**

It has been mentioned earlier that students with emotional disorders tend to shut down themselves from the rest of society, engaging themselves in individual activities, trying to compensate for their lack of friends or family interest. The following question has been set to inquiry about students free time routines, which might provide a general idea about their personalities.

Options	2M1				2M5				Total			
	Good performers		Weak performers		good performers		Weak performers		Good Performers		Weak Performers	
	N#	%										
<b>With friends</b>	3	37.50%	10	45.45%	4	57.14%	9	39.13%	7	46.67%	19	42.22%
<b>with family</b>	3	37.50%	6	27.27%	2	28.57%	9	39.13%	5	33.33%	15	33.33%
<b>alone</b>	2	25.00%	6	27.27%	1	14.29%	5	21.74%	3	20.00%	11	24.44%
<b>Total</b>	8	100%	22	100%	7	100%	23	100%	15	100%	45	100%

**Table 4.10:** Social interaction and the performance in EFL module

The obtained data demonstrates similar patterns of students’ openness to social interaction amongst both bad and good performing students. Statistically, 80% of good performers and 75.55% of weak performers testified that they prefer being engaged in social activities which implies their ability to socialize. This indicates that social interaction can have both negative and positive impacts on the performance of students in EFL classes. A potential theory for explaining this double edged effect is that not only the amount of social interaction students engage in that counts, but also the nature of interaction and participants.



**Figure 4.10:** Social interaction and the performance in EFL module, free time spending.

Nonetheless, the category that it is at risk of developing an emotional disturbance is that of children preferring to spend most of their spare times in isolation from others,

including family members. Despite the fact the chart above (figure 4.10) displays that there are 3 cases of good performers who would rather spend their free time individually, instead of engaging in social activities with their friends or family, it can yet be marked that another 11 students who share the same attitude toward socialization can still score low levels of achievement in EFL module. This sort of behavior is typical of students having emotional disturbances that make them uneasy around other people, and who might be suffering from constant peer-rejection because of their differences, physical, intellectual, or social. Anyways, these sorts of situations necessitate the intervention of teachers to help integrating these students in the classroom and school-life, in general, in coordination with their parents because these can be early signs or symptoms of depression or even an autism spectrum disorder (NIMH, 2009).

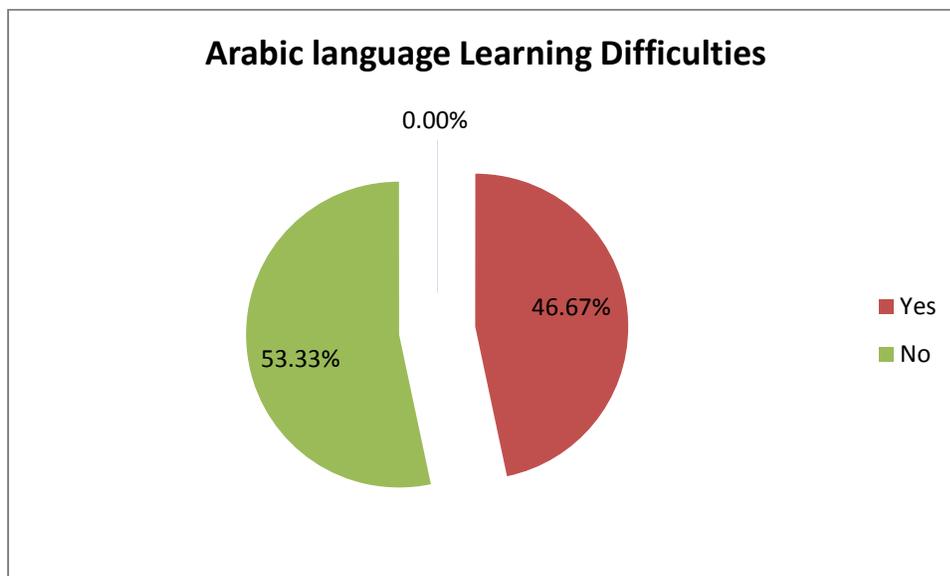
**6. Do you have difficulties using or learning Arabic language?**

Ramsey et al (2009) recognize a difference between foreign language challenges that are the result of the newness, and thus the difficulty of the “alien” language itself, and other language learning difficulties that are rooted in the learners’ use of their mother tongue language. The latter scenario is usually a case of language learning disability that limits students’ ability of both using and learning languages. Both this question and the coming one are specified for locating ML learning or using disabilities among these students, who all of them have at least 7 years of formal instruction on using Arabic language. The first stage of this identification includes asking students about the existence of any sort of difficulties using the Arabic language.

<i>Options</i>	<i>2M1</i>				<i>2M5</i>				<i>Total</i>			
	<i>Good performers</i>		<i>Poor performers</i>		<i>Good performers</i>		<i>Poor Performers</i>		<i>good performers</i>		<i>Poor Performers</i>	
	N#	%	N#	%	N#	%	N#	%	N#	%	N#	%
<i>Yes</i>	0	0.00%	11	50.00%	0	0.00%	10	43.48%	0	0.00%	21	46.67%
<i>No</i>	8	100%	11	50.00%	7	100.00%	13	56.52%	15	100%	24	53.33%
<i>Total</i>	8	100%	22	100%	7	100%	23	100%	15	100%	45	100%

*Table 4.11: The influence of Arabic learning disabilities on the performance of students in EFL module*

Most expectedly, the results have shown that 46.67 percent of the poor performers admitted having difficulties using or learning their L1, Arabic. These late facts, along with the absence of Arabic language learning difficulties among good EFL performers, 0% of which have issues with their L1, provide a valid ground for the research hypothesis about mild learning disabilities being a major factor into the discrepancy in the performance of students learning EFL.



**Figure 4.11:** *The prevalence of Arabic language learning and/or using difficulties amongst students with weak EFL performance*

These stats reflect just how great the damage caused by difficulties with the first language is. Given how long the period is that learners have been involved with mother tongue language (7 years, at least, of formal education) without overcoming their problems strongly suggest that these are not mere difficulties, but mild language learning disabilities that necessitates a specialized treatment for their conditions, if not wanting to risk a permanent dysfunction.

**7. If you answered yes, then what the nature of difficulties you are encountering with learning or using Arabic language?**

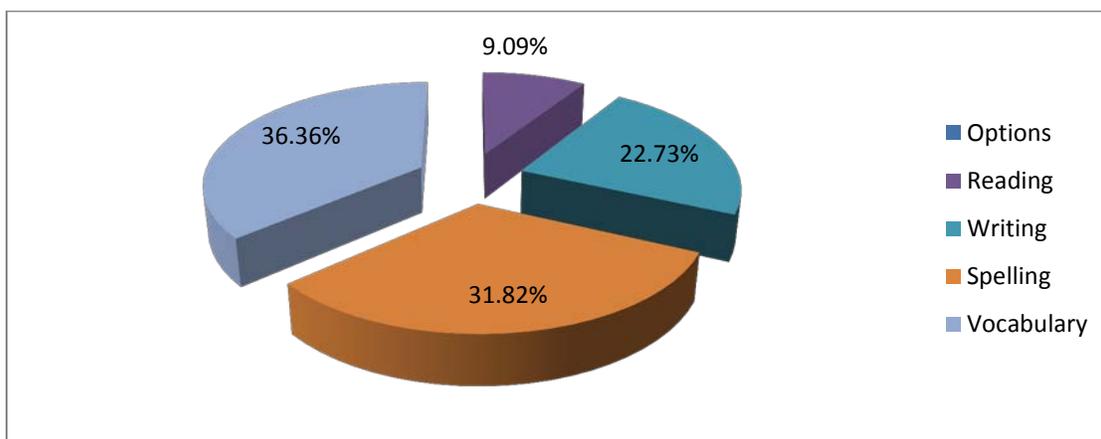
As further inquiry proceeds with the existence of language learning disabilities, the 7<sup>th</sup> question seeks to specify which language areas are affected the most. With four

options provided (reading, writing, spelling, or vocabulary), students are requested to checklist any of the problems they are having with Arabic language. Since none of the good performing students complained of having trouble with their L1, only the 46.76 percentage of weak performers (21 students) will be included.

c	2M1		2M5		Total	
	Weak performers		Weak performers		Weak performers	
	N#	%	N#	%	N#	%
<b>Reading</b>	1	5.26%	3	12.00%	4	9.09%
<b>Writing</b>	2	10.53%	8	32.00%	10	22.73%
<b>Spelling</b>	6	31.58%	8	32.00%	14	31.82%
<b>Vocabulary</b>	10	52.63%	6	24.00%	16	36.36%
<b>Total</b>	19	100.00%	25	100.00%	44	100.00%

*Table 4.12: the effects of Arabic language sources of difficulty on the performance of students in EFL classes*

These findings expose that language learning disabilities enfolds all of the four skills proposed in as the answering options for the seventh question, with vocabulary as the prominent “trouble-maker” (36.36%), and then spelling existing in 31.82% of the Arabic language using challenges, third, spelling problems at 22.73% of the registered cases of L1 learning difficulties, with finally, reading generates 9.09% of the cases of language disorders.



*Figure 4.12: Areas of difficulty in learning and using Arabic language*

There is, in the preceding chapter (III), a mentioning of the different specific learning disabilities that affect the individual's performance in learning languages, talking about *dyslexia* (reading deficiencies), *dysorthographia* (spelling disorder), and *dysgraphia* (defecting writing abilities). Usually, these sorts of disabilities are complications initiated by early mild intellectual or motor impairments (Westwood, 2008). Henley et al (2009) warn that leaving language learning disorders untreated risks them to turn into chronic conditions. For children to have these sorts of challenges with their L1 for such long periods of time- middle school second grader should at least be having a seven year experience of formal instruction in L1- it is a strong indication that some of these do indeed have a learning disability that requires specialized intervention. It should be reckoned that language usage dysfunction can impede the educational progress of the child in other modules, since most instructional behaviors rely heavily on language as the channel for implementing the input.

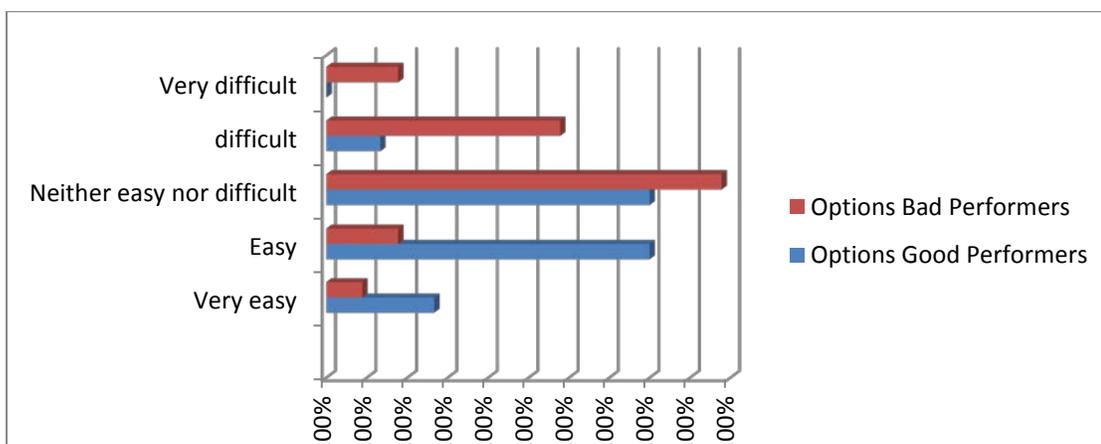
**8. *How do you find learning other modules such as mathematics?***

Based on the fact that mild intellectual disabilities have effects that are most significant in learning mathematics, which involves extensive use of intellectual processing (Henley, Ramsey, & Algozzine, 2009), this question was dedicated to establish some knowledge about the difficulties encountered learning other educational modules and its relation with the quality of performance in English as foreign language learning. On a scale of five options of varying levels of difficulty, students were asked to specify their other classes learning situation. The responds to this question were accumulated and presented statistically via the following grid:

Options	2M1				2M5				Total			
	Good performers		Poor performers		good performers		Poor performers		Good Performers		Poor Performers	
	N #	%	N #	%	N #	%	N #	%	N #	%	N #	%
<b>Very easy</b>	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	2	28.57%	2	8.70%	2	13.33%	2	4.44%
<b>Easy</b>	3	37.50%	2	9.09%	3	42.86%	2	8.70%	6	40.00%	4	8.89%
<b>Neither easy nor difficult</b>	5	62.50%	1	50.00%	1	14.29%	1	47.83%	6	40.00%	2	48.89%
<b>Difficult</b>	0	0%	8	36.36%	1	14.29%	5	21.74%	1	6.67%	1	28.89%
<b>Very difficult</b>	0	0.00%	1	4.55%	0	0.00%	3	13.04%	0	0.00%	4	8.89%
<b>Total</b>	8	100%	2	100%	7	100%	2	100%	1	100%	4	100%

*Table 4.13: the effects of difficulties in other modules on the level of performance in EFL classes*

The findings in table 4.13 portray a high percentage of weak performers, 37.78%, enduring difficulties learning other educational matters, which clearly is not the case for the category of good performers that recorded a sole case, 1 student admitted having learning other modules, such as mathematics, to be *difficult* (6.76%). These late facts suggest a strong potential connection between weak performance in other modules and that in EFL module.



*Figure 4.13 Difficulties in other modules and EFL module level of performance*

Judging by the relatively similar statistical pattern of other modules learning difficulties between 2M1 and 2M5; with 40.91% of 2M1 EFL bad performers and 34.78% from those of 2M5 encountering difficulties, as well, learning other modules, it is possible to eradicate any theory suggesting that the sole reason for such other modules learning difficulties rates is the unfulfilling instructional behavior students were exposed to. More closely related to mild disabilities is the proposition that having learning difficulties across various educational areas is not to be exclusively justified as the result of the difficulty of the material itself or as the result of an ineffective set of instructional inputs because these recent stats echoes the possibility of students having deficiencies in their learning attributes. For students to demonstrate bad learning habits different to those of their classmates, it can be associated with intellectual processing weaknesses, emotional unrest, or some sort of specific learning difficulty. In other words, a student regularly delivering poor performances in various learning subjects is nothing but a strong indication for him/her being challenged with a mild disability.

***9. How do you find learning English as a foreign language?***

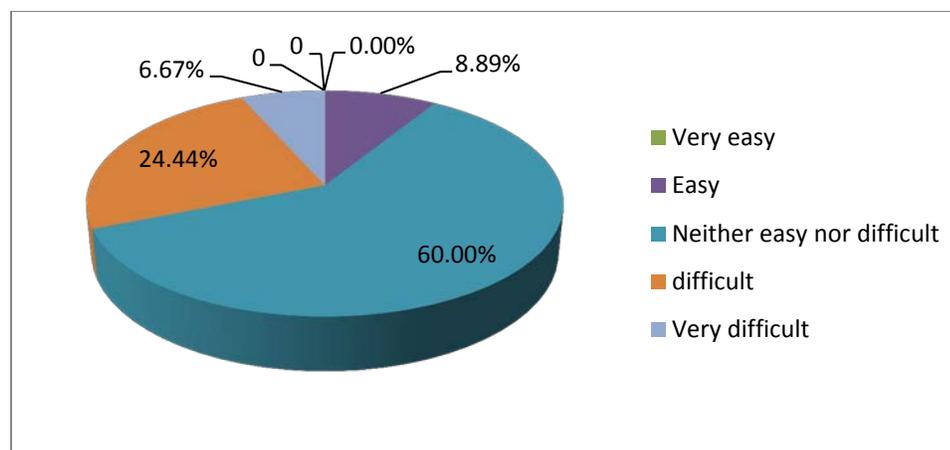
In the third chapter, there was a mentioning of the distinction between foreign language learning difficulties resulting from the FL dissimilarity to ML and those resulting because of the students malfunctioning abilities for learning languages. Question 9 represents an attempt for assessing how learners view learning English as a foreign language, in terms of difficulty.

Options	2M1				2M5				Total			
	Good performers		Poor performers		good performers		Poor performers		Good Performers		Poor Performers	
	N#	%										
<b>Very easy</b>	4	50.00%	0	0.00%	2	28.57%	0	0.00%	6	40.00%	0	0.00%
<b>Easy</b>	2	25.00%	2	9.09%	3	42.86%	2	8.70%	5	33.33%	4	8.89%
<b>Neither easy nor difficult</b>	2	25.00%	14	63.64%	1	14.29%	13	56.52%	3	20.00%	27	60.00%
<b>difficult</b>	0	0%	5	22.73%	1	14.29%	6	26.09%	1	6.67%	11	24.44%
<b>Very difficult</b>	0	0.00%	1	4.55%	0	0.00%	2	8.70%	0	0.00%	3	6.67%
<b>Total</b>	8	100%	22	100%	7	100%	23	100%	15	100%	45	100%

*Table 4.14: the difficulty of learning English as a foreign language*

According to the collected data, 73.33% of the good performing learners regard EFL learning as an easy task (40% as very easy and the 33.33% as easy), with the remaining 20% of the population maintained neutral stand about the matter, not being able to decide whether it is difficult to learn EFL or not, and a single case exception for a good performer who assessed learning EFL to be difficult.

On the other hand, the category of poor performers entailed only 8.89% of students who believe learning EFL to be an easy matter, another 31.2% considered EFL learning to be either difficult (24.44%), or very difficult (6.67%), whereas the remaining 60% chose to describe it as neither difficult nor easy, and this sort of position implies that EFL can be, both, at times difficult and at others less difficult.



**Figure 4.14:** Poor Performers Views toward the Difficulty of Learning EFL

With replies from both 2M1 and 2M5 indicating similar results of underachievers' assessments of EFL learning scale of difficulty, it is safe to assume that there is more to students underperformance in EFL other than lack of concentration or exam flops caused by mere anxiety, particularly when 91.11 percent of the EFL less-achieving population admits that it is no easy matter learning a foreign language such English language. Foreign language difficulties, however, can take two scenarios. First is the case of the foreign language being so different from the ML that it causes confusion. Secondly, students may have difficulties using their very native language; such the effects of those difficulties may extend to learning other languages, and that what was proven to be the case through question II.6.

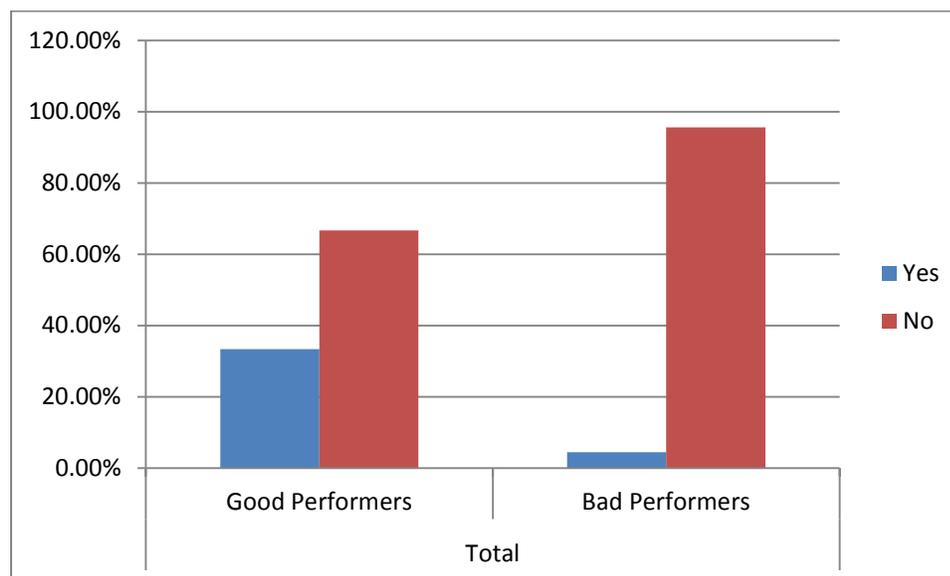
***10. Have you previously received any sort of special treatment for your difficulties in learning EFL by your teacher or a specialist?***

Question 10 was devised to determine how much attention students with EFL learning difficulties receive to help them overcome their problems, and if existed how much effective it is.

Options	2M1				2M5				Total			
	Good performers		Poor performers		good performers		Poor performers		Good Performers		Poor Performers	
	N#	%	N#	%	N#	%	N#	%	N#	%	N#	%
<b>Yes</b>	2	25.00%	0	0.00%	3	42.86%	2	8.70%	5	33.33%	2	4.44%
<b>No</b>	6	75.00%	22	100%	4	57.14%	21	91.30%	10	66.67%	43	95.56%
<b>Total</b>	8	100%	22	100%	7	100%	23	100%	15	100%	45	100%

*Table 4.15: The influence of special assistance on the*

The results demonstrated in table 4.15, unsurprisingly, calculates a low rate of students who were fortunate enough to have been involved in some kind of special treatment helping them overcome their difficulties learning EFL, just 7 students over the 60 questioned had a positive response (i.e., of being involved in some sort of special treatment).



*Figure 4.15: Special Assistance and EFL Learning Performance*

Figure 4.15 illustrates that there is a clear gap between the percentage of good performers who received assistance learning EFL -33.33%- and that of poor performers who were exposed to such treatment, with only 4.44%. However, it must be highlighted that despite having 5 students for whom the treatment was effective, evident in the good

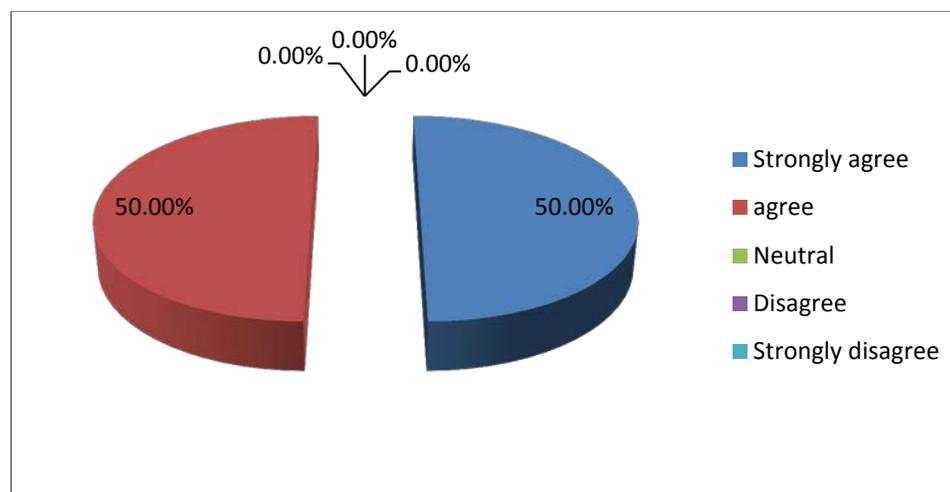
performance they made, the other two students failed to make the same impression. It is quite plausible that these two learners were not exposed to the most suitable treatment possible for their condition, and that all they had were extra reinforcement sessions. Ergo, it can be concluded that specialized *paraeducational* treatment is essential for some conditions of learning English as a foreign language, which is the case for students with mild disabilities.

**11. What do you think about receiving specialized assistance to learn EFL?**

Utilizing Likert’s scale of agreeing, students were requested to state where they stand in the proposition for including specialized personnel (paraeducators) in the educational system for the provision of effective remediation to their EFL learning inconveniences.

Options	2M1				2M5				Total			
	Good performers		low performers		good performers		low performers		Good Performers		Bad Performers	
	N #	%	N#	%	N#	%	N#	%	N#	%	N#	%
<b>Strongly agree</b>	4	50.00 %	8	36.36%	4	57.14%	14	60.87 %	8	53.33%	22	48.89%
<b>Agree</b>	4	50.00 %	14	63.64%	3	42.86%	9	39.13 %	7	46.67%	23	51.11%
<b>Neutral</b>	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
<b>Disagree</b>	0	0%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
<b>Strongly disagree</b>	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
<b>Total</b>	8	100%	22	100%	7	100%	23	100%	15	100%	45	100%

*Table 4.16: Views about the involvement of specialized assistance in improving EFL learning performance*



**Figure 4.16:** Students approval for dedicating specialized personnel for helping them Overcome EFL Learning Difficulties

Data displayed in the table above make a clear reflection to the sense of enthusiasm, all 60 students (100%) have toward the proposal of having specialized help, namely paraeducators, who have an experience in both fields of psychology and teaching, since it is almost impossible for teachers to have enough knowledge of the different symptoms and learning complications, such ensuing mild disabilities, that can hurdle the educational development of students. Furthermore, most teachers lack of experience, if any, in teaching students with mild, moderate learning disabilities prevent them providing a comprehensive treatment for the disabled subject.

#### **4.5.1.3 Mini English as a Foreign Language learning aptitude test for Arabic Language Users**

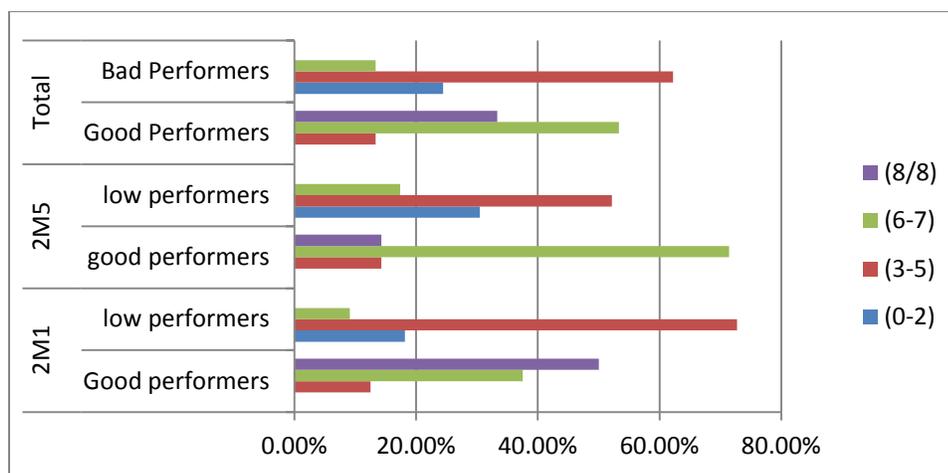
With the limitations of time imposed by teachers, administering a complete aptitude test, with 30 questions and a period of 30 minutes at minimum, was beyond hand. Thus, dedicating this *mini aptitude* as an integrated entity of the questionnaire was seen as the most efficient solution possible. It enfolds two simple exercises, (a) testing students' proficiency/aptitude in Arabic language and (b) testing some of the students' basic knowledge in English language. After all, students may have got confused in the rhythm of all those questions, forgetting some of the details, hence checking students' aptitude for learning English as foreign language because Aptitude tests can help

diagnosing mild disabilities, by gauging the level of intellectual development each individual has. The following data (table 3.17) represent the results scored by students answering the 8 questions of the mini-aptitude test:

Scores	2M1				2M5				Total			
	Good performers		low performers		good performers		low performers		Good Performers		Bad Performers	
	N#	%	N#	%	N#	%	N#	%	N#	%	N#	%
(0-2)	0	0.00%	4	18.18%	0	0.00%	7	30.43%	0	0.00%	11	24.44%
(3-5)	1	12.50%	16	72.73%	1	14.29%	12	52.17%	2	13.33%	28	62.22%
(6-7)	3	37.50%	2	9.09%	5	71.43%	4	17.39%	8	53.33%	6	13.33%
(8/8)	4	50%	0	0.00%	1	14.29%	0	0.00%	5	33.33%	0	0.00%
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>100%</b>

*Table 4.17: The Result of EFL Learning Mini-Aptitude Test for Arabic Language users*

According to the registered results, there were only 13.33% of bad performing students able to answer more than six questions, with no perfect score (8/8) at all. More successfully, no less than 86.66% of the good EFL performing participants have been able to score over 6 points in the two questions. It just demonstrates the enormous difference of abilities and potential each of the two categories have to learning English as a foreign language. Hence counter measures must be followed to trace and eliminate possible causes of such discrepancy in aptitudes. Not only that, but there are five different cases of students to have all eight of the questions answered, which means 33.33% percent of the better performing population.



***Figure 4.17: The Relation between Aptitude Test Performance and EFL Performance***

Despite the easy nature of the aptitude measurements used and the friendly setting (using Arabic and not having any pressurizing mental constraints), a total of 41 students failed to score over 5 points, only 2 of which were good performers scoring between 5 and 3. As to the rest of low aptitude test performers, 39 participants of which were, as well, EFL underachievers, representing 86.66% of the overall EFL poor performing category. As a conclusion to these late results, students failing as good performing EFL learners can no longer be justified as the side effect of students' lack of interest in learning EFL, or them struggling with learning the new "alien" language. The reason is that the results of the administered mini-aptitude test statistically prove that most students (86.66%) lack of achievement, in fact, is originated from a lack of potential and aptitude to learn English as a foreign language. This carries a strong chance of some of these students having some sort of untreated learning deficiency. As a matter of fact, there are 24.44% of underperformers who were not able to score more than two points, which raises serious concerns about the possibility of mild intellectual, emotional, or specific learning disabilities.

***4.5.2 Questionnaire II: for teachers***

After having dealt with the clues provided from students' responses to questionnaire I, now, it is turn to consult the professional experience of teachers, with an attempt to whether confirm or deny the hypothesis about the negative impact mild disabilities, if existed, have on the performance of EFL learners. It is a fact that diagnosing individuals with a mild learning disabilities requires an extensive, constant observation of his/her every behavior in the educational setting, e.g. for a child to be confirmed as having an emotional disturbance, a period of six months of observation is required (IDEA, 2006). Ergo, such requirements, in the given circumstances, can only be attained by relying on the testimonies of several teachers, 6, concerning the matter. However, these teachers are most likely to have little, if any, knowledge about this subject, mild disabilities, given the "official denial" of its existence, so as a solution, the questionnaire II mainly takes a form of a diagnosis checklist of the most visual symptoms this population tend to exhibit in a school-environment. More precisely, questionnaire II

enlists some of the more prominent manifestations of the three categories of mild disability, respectively, emotional, intellectual, and specific learning disabilities (in middle school level).

**4.5.2.1 Background Information:**

This section enfold three questions about the level of educational formation, EFL teaching experience, and experience teaching students with special needs, if existed.

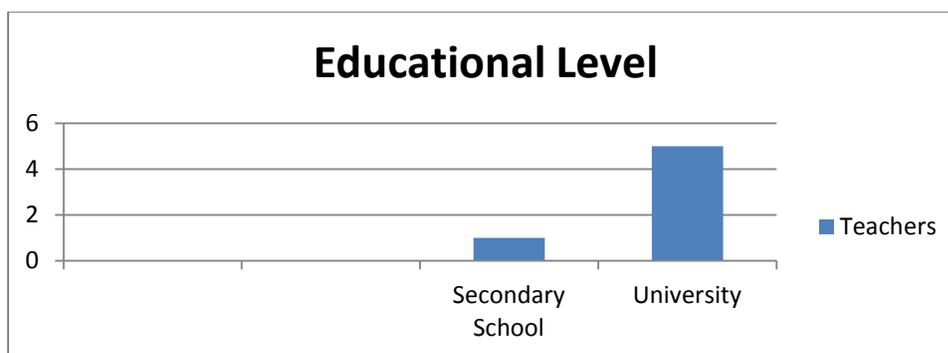
**1. Level of Educational Formation:**

Given the previously used teaching occupational regulations, the question was established to determine what level teachers have because EFL teachers with a university diplomat are most likely to have been exposed to the module of educational psychology, which provides some insights into the humanitarian aspects of teaching, and specifies some of the psychological needs of students.

<i>Educational Level</i>	<i>Teachers</i>	
	N#	%
<b>Secondary School</b>	1	16.67%
<b>University</b>	5	83.33%
<b>Total</b>	6	100%

**Table 4.18:** Educational background of the responding teachers

According the results demonstrated above, 5 of the responding, 83.33%, 6 teachers have a high educational level, which should indicate that they have some sort of knowledge about the psychology of teaching.



**Figure 4.18:** Educational Background of Responding Teachers

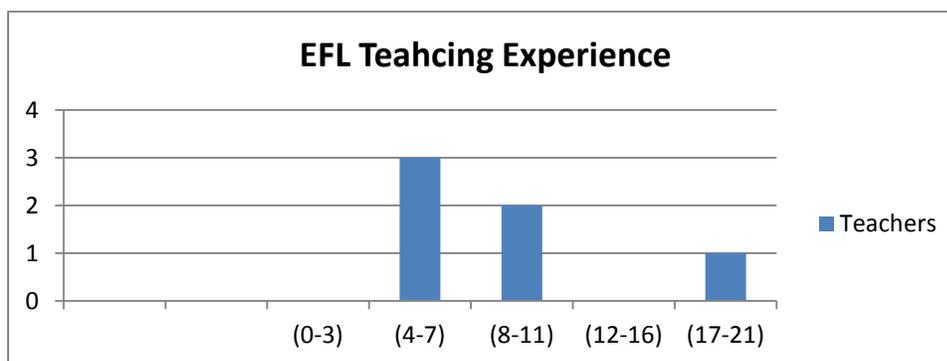
Nonetheless, and judging by personal experience (five semesters of educational psychology), having been engaged in modules of educational psychology cannot guarantee them having had input about the different conditions and characteristics of mild disabilities, not alone having guidelines about the instructional strategies for efficiently treating this special needed category of students.

**2. Years of experience teaching EFL**

Having experienced teachers as questionnaire respondents can ensure a more accurate diagnosis because teachers with the most experience usually have firm control over their classrooms, which would help isolate anomalies in behavior. Furthermore, such experienced classroom management can help spot any discrepancy in intellectual abilities of students, as well as, any other specific learning challenges. Not to mention that the more experience the teacher have, the greater the possibility of them having witnessed cases of mild disability it can be.

Years of Experience	Teachers	
	N#	%
(0-3)	0	0.00%
(4-7)	3	50.00%
(8-11)	2	33.33%
(12-16)	0	0.00%
(17-21)	1	16.67%
<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

*Table 4.19: Responding teachers' years of experience in teaching EFL*



*Figure 4.19: Responding teachers' years of experience in teaching EFL*

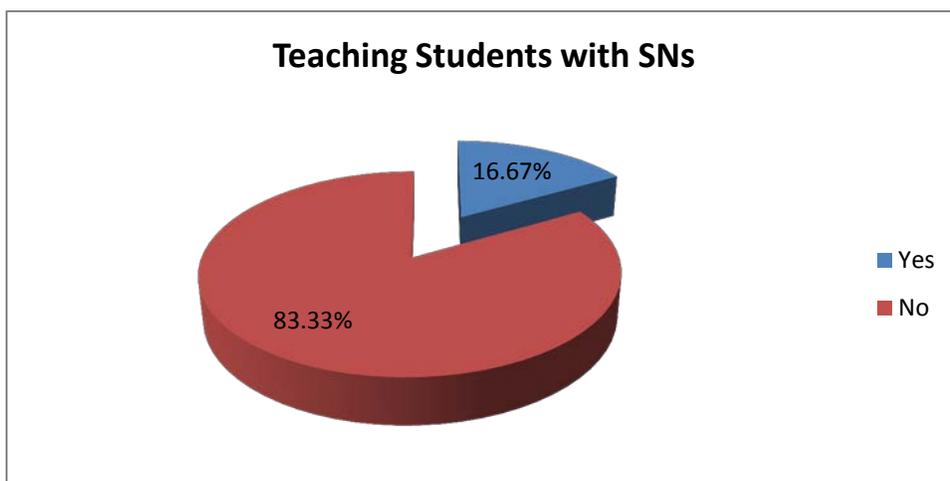
As illustrated, all 6 teachers have got at least 4 years of experience teaching EFL, with 50% of them having 4 to 7 years of EFL teaching experience, other 33.33% with 8-11 years' experience, and a remaining sole respondent having a 20 years teaching EFL. Therefore, the whole population can be considered as an experience set of teachers.

**3. Do you have experience teaching students with special needs?**

This third question is concerned with inquiring about whether have been situations where these responding teachers had to deal with students having either physical or mental disabilities in their general education classrooms. Having such experience might indicate teachers having a certain level of knowledge about the educational needs and peculiar features students with disabilities, regardless to their severity, have.

<i>Options</i>	Total	
	N#	%
<b>Yes</b>	1	16.67%
<b>No</b>	5	83.33%
<b>Total</b>	6	100%

**Table 4.20:** *The existence of experience teaching EFL to students with special needs*



**Figure 4.20:** *Experience Teaching EFL to Students with Special Needs*

With 83.33% of the responding population denying any experience of teaching students with special needs (SNs), and a single teacher, 16.67%, having had some sort of

experience instructing children with SNs, it is plausible to assume that most learners with impairments fail to qualify for Middle school level. However, the question is whether these teachers interpretation of the concept special needs include mild disabilities as a source of those special requirements. Therefore, the following question is devised to verify teacher’s familiarity with the concept of mild disability.

**4.5.2.2 Investigating the Effects and Existence of Mild Disabilities:**

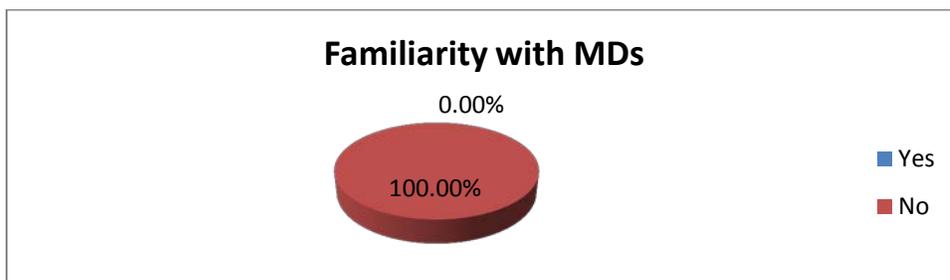
Relying on their daily observations of and contact with students, teachers are requested to testify about the existence of a number of symptoms associated with the three chief categories of mild disability, and that are manifested in some of their low performing students behaviors and attitudes.

**1. Are you familiar with the term mild disability?**

In order to gauge teachers’ awareness about the existence and manifestations of mild disabilities, teachers are directly asked if they have any previous knowledge about the concept.

<i>Options</i>	Total	
	N#	%
<b>Yes</b>	0	0.00%
<b>No</b>	6	100.00%
<b>Total</b>	6	100%

**Table 4.21:** Teachers’ familiarity with the term mild disability



**Figure 4.21:** Teachers’ familiarity with term mild disability

According to the demonstrated results, 100% of the teachers having no idea about the indications of the term mild disability, it is only safe to assume that official awareness of this category of learning disabilities is at minimum, which confirms previous concerns

about students with mild disabilities suffering in silence. Nonetheless, this does not imply that teachers will not be of much help identifying MDs among underachievers, who are usually described as lazy and unwilling to learn.

➤ *Investigating Emotional Disturbance*

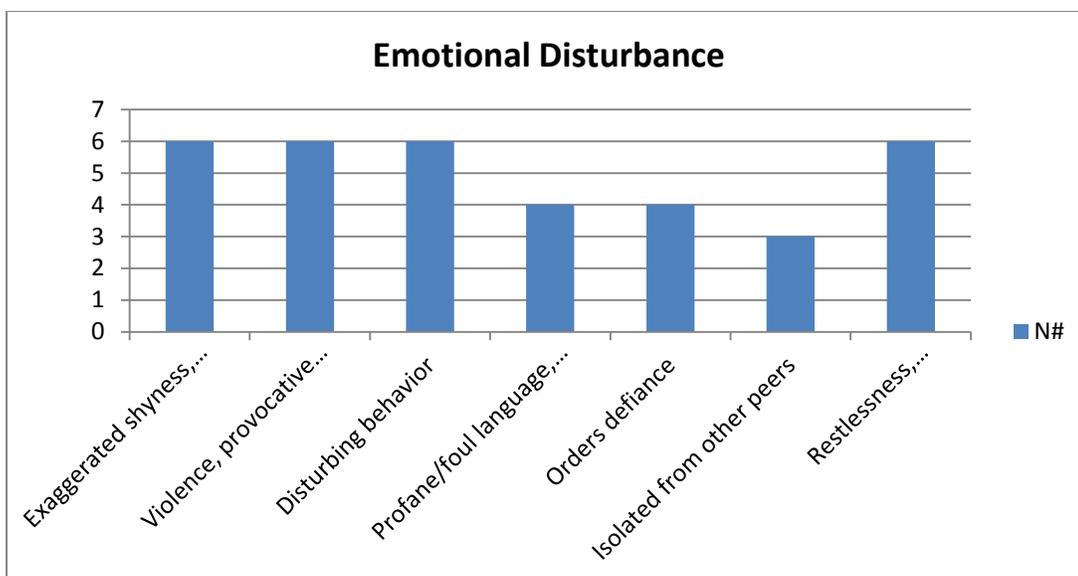
**2. Do some of your low achieving students tend to demonstrate the following behaviors?**

The question is followed by a grid including a number of the most common behaviors that individuals with emotional disturbances tend to exhibit in their school-environment (Chinn, 2010). Teachers are asked to indicate whether they have encountered or observed those seven symptoms amongst their underperforming students.

Options	Exaggerated shyness, anxiety	Violence, provocative attitude	Disturbing classroom behavior	Profane/fool language, inconsiderate	Orders defiance	Isolated from other peers	Restlessness, overactive, annoying, or noisy	Total Teachers
N#	6	6	6	4	4	3	6	6
%	100%	100%	100%	66.67%	66.67%	50%	100%	100%

**Table 4.22:** *The existence of some symptoms of emotional disturbance among EFL underperformers*

Unaware of the symptoms mildly disabled students tend to demonstrate, the responding EFL teachers were requested to identify a set of characteristics that are common amongst students with emotional disturbance. The results were quite dreadful, given how prevalent these EDs symptoms are amidst EFL underperformers. More accurately, all 6 teachers, 100%, were able to recognize at least four of the enlisted emotional disturbance manifestation.



**Figure 4.22:** The existence of some symptoms of emotional disturbance among EFL underperformers

Further illustration is provided in figure 4.22, where there has been a full agreement, 100%, about the existence of four of the symptoms: shyness, aggressiveness, disturbing behavior, and restlessness in classroom. Concerning the other three, only 4 teachers, 66.76%, confirmed witnessing cases of students using profane/foul language, or defying their orders, and this might be explained in terms of the two teachers having a rigid management over their students (particularly when having two teachers of over 10 year experience). Nonetheless, the other case of poor performing students isolating themselves from other peers was sighted by just 3 of the total teachers, 50%, and that can be explained in terms of withdrawal from others being associated with depression or with an autistic spectrum disorder, which according to the American center of disease control and prevention, there is a chance of 1 in 88 children to be diagnosed with a mild disability (CDC, 2012).

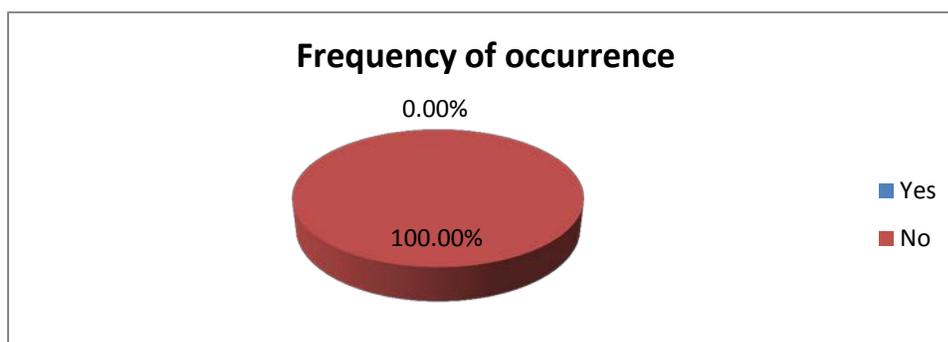
**3. Do these previous behaviors occur frequently for more than six month time span?**

The individual with disabilities educational act (IDEA, 2006) assert that for children to be diagnosed with an emotional disturbance, the aforementioned symptoms

must be present for over six month period, resembling a fixed behavioral pattern. Therefore, teachers were asked to confirm that fact through the question 3.

<i>Options</i>	Total	
	N#	%
<b>Yes</b>	0	0.00%
<b>No</b>	6	100.00%
<b>Total</b>	6	100%

**Table 4.23:** the frequent occurrence of the aforementioned symptoms for over 6 months



**Figure 4.23:** the frequent occurrence of the aforementioned symptoms for over 6 months

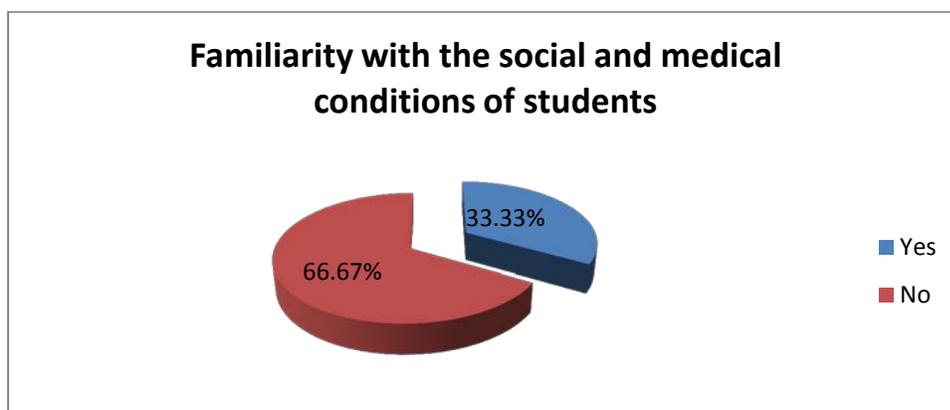
These late demonstrated results are rather a confirmation to the previous claims that some underachievers suffer from various emotional disturbances that impede their educational progress in learning EFL. Nonetheless, a further specialized diagnosis would be a prerequisite, in order to help determine the genuine nature of these behavior disorders. Teachers can, as well, have an integrative role in such process, in the sense that they should have an extensive knowledge about the social and health conditions their students have, yet do they really have such knowledge?

**4. Are you familiar with your students’ family and health history/conditions?**

In the previous chapter, Pierangelo and Giuliani (2008) argued that for teachers to confront the instructional challenges that mild learning disabilities carry, they will need to have solid base of information about the medical and social background of each and every student, particularly those suspected of having a mild disability because this can also be of great assistance to locating the potential causes for some students weak performance, so proper remediation can be prepared.

<i>Options</i>	Total	
	N#	%
<b>Yes</b>	2	33.33%
<b>No</b>	4	66.67%
<b>Total</b>	6	100%

**Table 4.24:** Teachers familiarity with their students’ social and medical conditions



**Figure 4.24:** Teachers familiarity with their students’ social and medical conditions

The illustrated statistics illustrate that only 2 of the questioned teachers, 33.33%, have claimed to have familiarity with the social and medical background of their students. However, the remaining 66.67% of the respondents, 4 teachers, denied having any kind of knowledge about the background of their students. Given the fact that emotionally disturbed students are in most cases, individuals who have been lacking constructive social contact because of the domestic conditions they grew up in, Liabo and Richardson (2007) suggest that teachers have regular home-visits to the family house and to the neighbors.

➤ ***Investigating Mild Intellectual Disabilities***

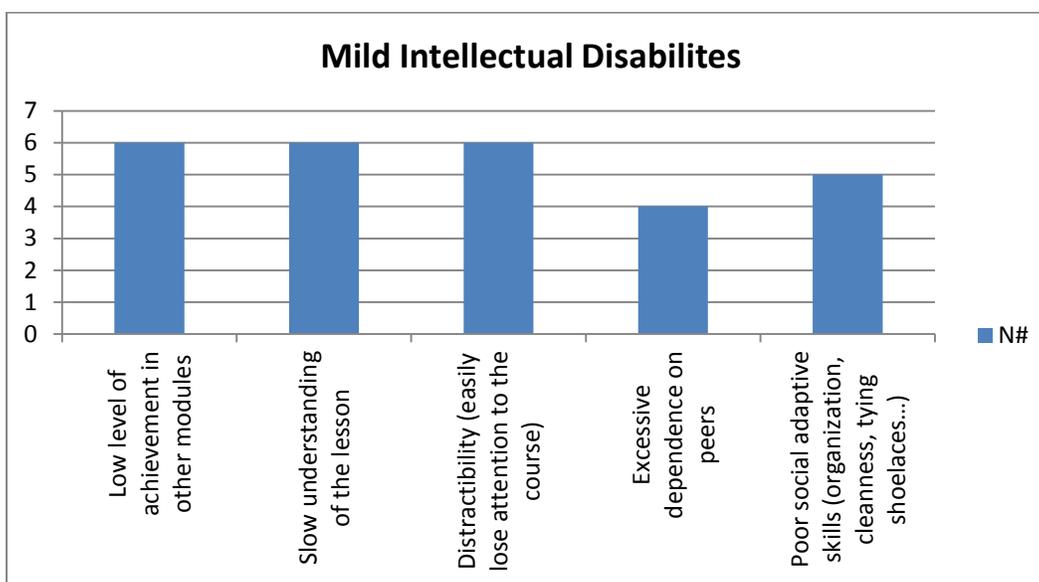
**5. Do some of your less achieving students exhibit the following characteristics?**

Once again, and in order to employ teachers’ daily observations to the good of identifying the relation between mild intellectual deficits and underachievement in EFL module, teachers were exposed to a list of symptoms typical of students with MIDs, and then asked to checklist any of the symptoms reflected on the learning behavior of their low achieving students. The presented mild intellectual disabilities features were

proposed by Henley and his associates (2009) as a summary to the most visible characteristics of mild intellectual disabilities.

Options	Low level of achievement in other modules	Slow understanding of the lesson	Distractibility (easily lose attention to the course)	Excessive dependence on peers	Poor social adaptive skills (organization, cleanness, tying shoelaces...)	Total Teachers
N#	6	6	6	4	5	6
%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	66.67%	83.33%	100%

**Table 4.25:** The existence of some symptoms of mild intellectual disabilities among EFL underperformers



**Figure 4.25:** The existence of some symptoms of mild intellectual disabilities among EFL underperformers

After having confirmed that emotional disturbances do exist amongst EFL underperforming students, the illustrated results tend to go into that direction as well, in the sense of confirming the existence of mild intellectual disabilities, where all EFL teachers were able to identify at least three different symptoms as present amongst some of their poor performing students. More precisely, 3 of the symptoms have been identified by all 6 responding teachers; namely, the 100% identified symptoms are low level of achievement in other modules, slow understanding of the lesson, and constant distractibility during lessons. As to the remaining two symptoms, EFL students' excessive dependence on peers has been noted by only 4, 66.67%, of the respondents, and

cases of EFL poor performers lacking social adaptive skills (e.g., personal cleanness/hygiene, organization...) were confirmed witnessed by 5 teachers, 83.33%. Despite all, these facts are a clear indication of the existence of mild intellectual disabilities amongst EFL weak performers, which 100% of the responding teachers did confirm. This can only be interpreted as further evidence to the devastating effects of MDs on learning EFL.

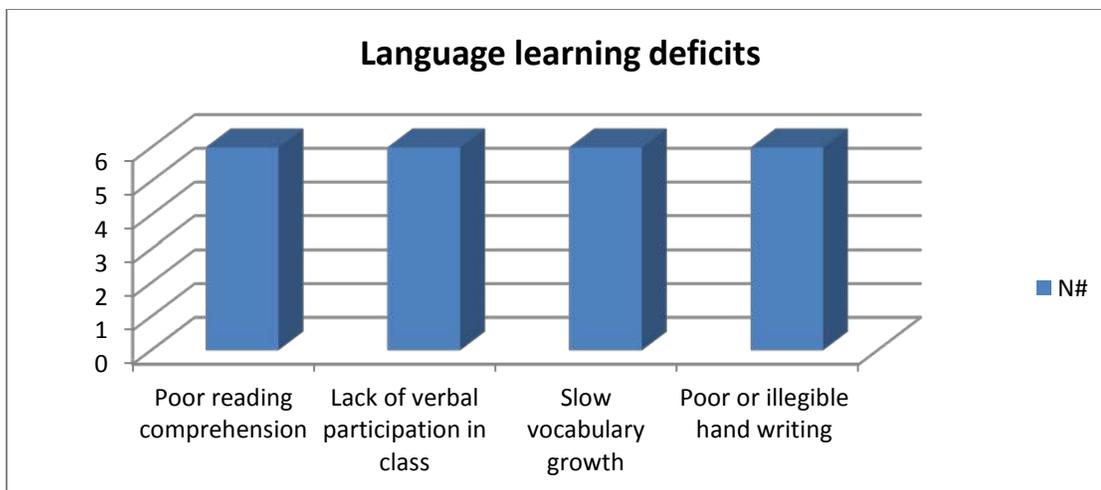
➤ *Investigating specific learning disabilities*

**6. Investigating language learning deficits:**

It has been clarified earlier that unlike the other two categories of mild disabilities, specific learning disabilities, as the name suggest, can only be spotted in a learning environment. The latter can even be considered as a manifestation to both mild intellectual and behavioral disorders (Henley, Ramsey, & Algozzine, 2009). Toward a more English as a foreign language learning related matter, the 6<sup>th</sup> question targets identifying the existence of a number of language learning deficits that are common to children at middle school level that proposed by Pierangelo and Giuliani(2008).

<b>Options</b>	<b>Poor reading comprehension</b>	<b>Lack of verbal participation in class</b>	<b>Slow vocabulary growth</b>	<b>Poor or illegible hand writing</b>	<b>Total Teachers</b>
N#	6	6	6	6	6
%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100%

**Table 4.26:** *The existence of language learning deficits among EFL underperforming students*



*Figure 4.26: The existence of language learning deficits among EFL underperforming students*

The illustrated statistics reflect a unanimous agreement about the presence of all suggested symptoms of learning deficits on some of their underperforming students. In other word, all four deficits, poor reading comprehension, lack of verbal participation in class, slow vocabulary growth, and poor or illegible hand writing, were confirmed by all 6 responding teachers, 100%, as common among those low performing EFL learners. This simply proves the initial suggestions of the study about the drastic effects mild might disabilities have on learning EFL.

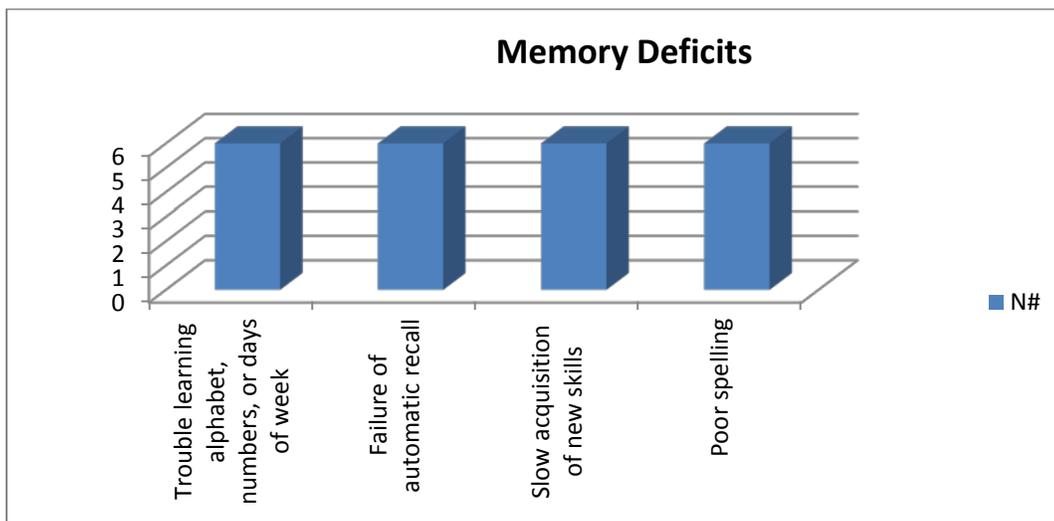
**7. Investigating Memory-related Learning deficits**

After having examined the effects and the presence of specific language learning deficits as an impeding factor to the progress of some students learning EFL, it is turn, now, to examine the problems caused by memory dysfunction on learning EFL. The enlisted symptoms are, as well, common at middle school level, and they are a reflection to what EFL teachers might experience with students having specific memory deficits.

Options	Trouble learning alphabet, numbers, or days of week	Failure of automatic recall (i.e., remember previous knowledge without other help)	Slow acquisition of new skills (e.g., how to make requests)	Poor spelling	Total Teachers
N#	6	6	6	6	6
%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100%

*Table 4.27: The existence of memory deficits among EFL underperforming students*

As surprising as it is, all 4 symptoms have been confirmed spotted among EFL underperforming learners by a total of 6 EFL teachers, 100%. That can only mean that memory problems are being a major contributor to some students' lack of achievement in EFL module.



**Figure 4.27:** *The existence of memory deficits among EFL underperforming students*

Furthermore, figure 4.27 illustrates how that all 6 teachers confirm the existence of all four symptoms of memory dysfunction, trouble learning alphabet, numbers, or days of week, failure of automatic recall, slow acquisition of new skills, and, finally, poor spelling. More importantly, these late facts provide a solid background to the earlier speculation made in the research about the potential negative effects of mild disabilities on the performance of students learning English as a foreign language.

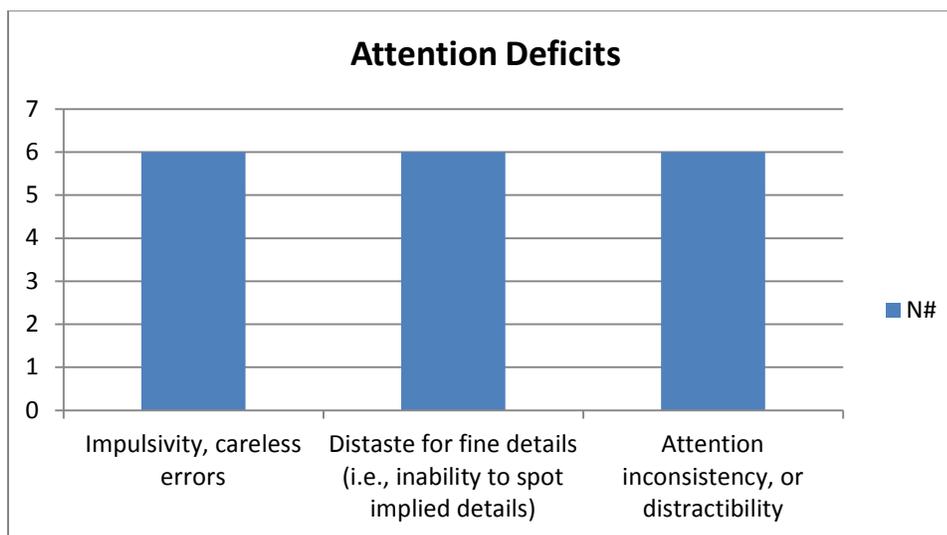
**8. Investigating Attention-related learning deficits**

Slow understanding of the lesson or failure to recall afore-taught knowledge is not only resulted by a weak memory or a below par intellectual abilities; but also a matter of failure to perceive the input properly due to a dysfunction in the receptive organs or a lack of attention. However, when this lack of attention develops into a habit, students are potentially suffering from *an attention disorder*. The 8<sup>th</sup> question was set to inquire the presence of some attention deficits among low performing students. Similar to all

previous symptoms of specific learning disabilities, the proposed three symptoms are proven to be common amidst middle school learners.

Options	Impulsivity, careless errors	Distaste for fine details (i.e., inability to spot implied details)	Attention inconsistency, or distractibility	Total Teachers
N#	6	6	6	6
%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100%

**Table 4.28:** The existence of attention deficits among EFL underperforming students



**Figure 4.28:** The existence of attention deficits among EFL underperforming students

As disheartening as they are, the demonstrated results reflect that all six teachers, 100% of the respondents, unanimously amen the fact that all three symptoms are associated with the learning behavior of some of their underachieving students. More precisely, impulsivity and careless errors, distaste for fine details, and attention inconsistency have been 100% confirmed as being a quality of some EFL low achieving students, and this what can be regarded as a continuation to the aforementioned series of evidence to the negative influence mild disabilities have on learning EFL.

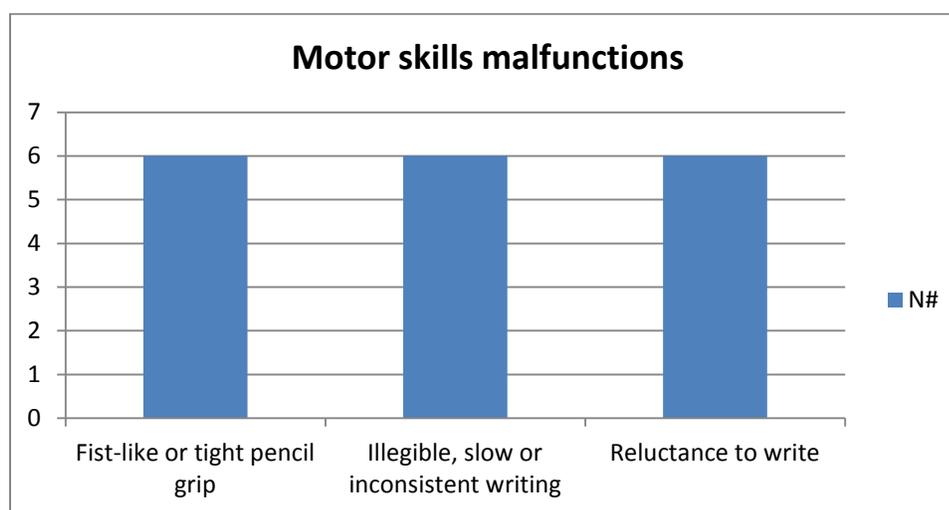
**9. Investigating Motor skill learning related deficits**

Since the research concerned with challenges imposed by mild disabilities on learning EFL, the 9<sup>th</sup> question is directed to inspect about the relationship between motor

skills malfunctions and the poor performance of some learners, in terms of their difficulties with handwriting. It ought to be mentioned that the effects of illegible handwriting exceeds the realm of EFL learning, as it effect all written language based inputs, which unfortunately is the case of most, if not all, educational modules. The following motor skills symptoms were selected, for that they are prevalent on middle school level. (Pierangelo & Giuliani, 2008)

Options	Fist-like or tight pencil grip	Illegible, slow or inconsistent writing	Reluctance to write	Total Teachers
N#	6	6	6	6
%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100%

*Table 4.29: The existence of motor skill deficits among EFL underperformers*



*Figure 4.29: The existence of motor skill deficits among EFL underperformers*

The figures demonstrated in both table 4.29 and figure 4.29 indicate the fact that some EFL underperforming students tend to demonstrate motor skill deficits, and that what all EFL questioned teachers, 100%, have confirmed to be the case with all three symptoms, fist-like or tight pencil grip, illegible, slow or inconsistent writing, and reluctance to write, alike were manifested through the writing behaviors of some EFL low achieving learners. Ergo, this can only be interpreted as a confirmation to the early hypothesis of mild disabilities causing students to underperform in the EFL module.

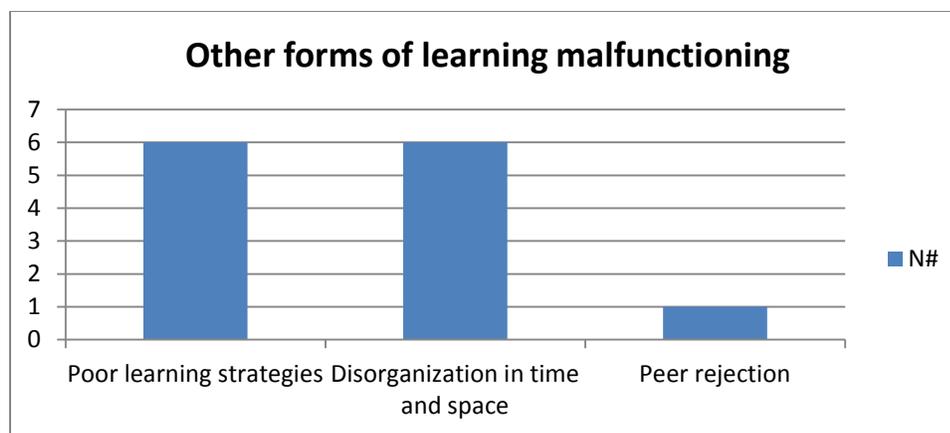
***10. Investigating other learning malfunctions:***

In addition to language, memory, attention, and motor skills deficits, there are some other forms learning malfunctioning, from which question 10 enlisted three learning deficits that has been described by Pierangelo and Giuliani (2008) as being most common among middle school learners. These other learning malfunctions are mostly related to students’ unproductive learning behavior and tactics which might limit their chances of success.

<b>Options</b>	<b>Poor learning strategies</b>	<b>Disorganization in time and space</b>	<b>Peer rejection</b>	<b>Total Teachers</b>
N#	6	6	1	6
%	100.00%	100.00%	16.67%	100%

***Table 4.30: The existence of other learning deficits among EFL underperformers***

Despite what the results demonstrate about having a sole teacher, 16.67% of the respondents, confirming witnessing cases of EFL weak performers rejecting assistance from their classroom counterparts because such case resembles an extreme situation of social isolation, the other two forms of learning deficits are quite common among EFL underachievers, according to the 100% of teachers who recognized poor learning strategies and disorganization in time and space as being associated with the low performing students. Much of the results about the existence of learning deficits among students with low level of performance in EFL classes can only deem the hypothesis suggesting a negative effect caused by mild disabilities to the performance of students learning EFL as accurate and rational.



**Figure 4.30:** The existence of other learning deficits among EFL underperformers

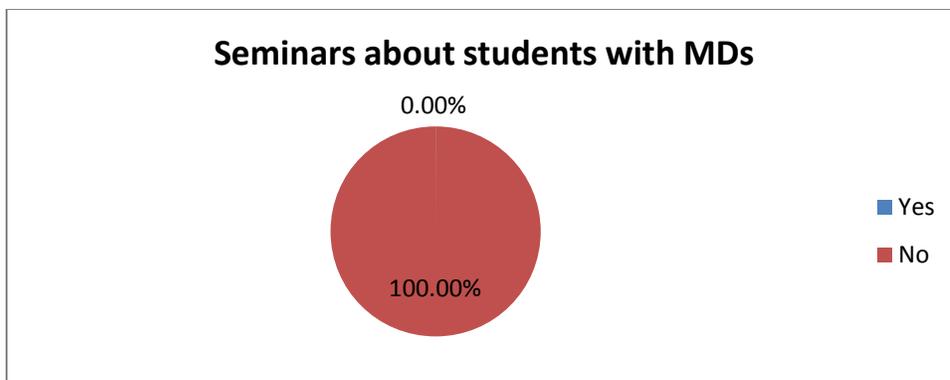
➤ *Investigating the Official recognition and availability of psycho-pedagogical assistance for EFL teachers*

**11. Have you been involved in official pedagogical seminars about students with mild intellectual disabilities, emotional disturbance, or any other specific learning disabilities?**

In order to gauge how much official recognition there is toward students with mild disabilities, teachers were requested to confirm or deny having seminars conducted by middle school pedagogical inspectors about students with any of the aforementioned three categories of mild disability.

<b>Options</b>	<b>Total</b>	
	<b>N#</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Yes</b>	0	0.00%
<b>No</b>	6	100.00%
<b>Total</b>	6	100%

**Table 4.31:** The involvement of EFL teachers in pedagogical seminars about students with mild disabilities



**Figure 4.31:** *The involvement of EFL teachers in pedagogical seminars about students with mild disabilities*

However, none of the questioned teachers, 0% illustrated in figure 4.31, did confirm having seminars of the sort. This leads to the belief that education officials have no concern toward or any knowledge about mild disabilities, and this might explain their actions of not involving EFL teachers in informative sessions about the effects and characteristics of mild disabilities. Consequently, these facts serve to ascertain the research previous claims about the absence of official or governmental assistance for students with mild disabilities, which is resulted from their ignorance of such permanent “learning crippledness”, and that also confirms their negligence of the human factor, i.e., students themselves and their every particular need.

**12. If yes what was that you have tackled? If no, could you suggest some plausible explanation for not having any?**

Since none of the responding EFL educators confirmed having any seminars about students with mild disabilities, all available question responses are about the suggestion of plausible reasons for not having any. However, only 5 of the 6 teachers could provide possible reasons for inspectors to not have held such psycho-pedagogical meetings. The five attained explanations are as follow:

- Most of the pedagogical seminars, EFL teachers have, are mainly concerned “with the implementation of textbook materials.”
- One of the respondents believes that “pedagogical inspectors have no knowledge about such concept.”

- Inspectors are unaware of the importance of having pedagogical seminars about students with mild disabilities.
- Another respondent suggests that the reason for not having any seminars about students with MDs is that this category of learners is “totally neglected by the Ministry of education”.
- The last one argues that the reason for not having seminars about students with mild disabilities is that they only tackle strategies of motivating students because of inspectors not thinking of “aggressive pupils or poor achieving pupils” as having a learning disability.

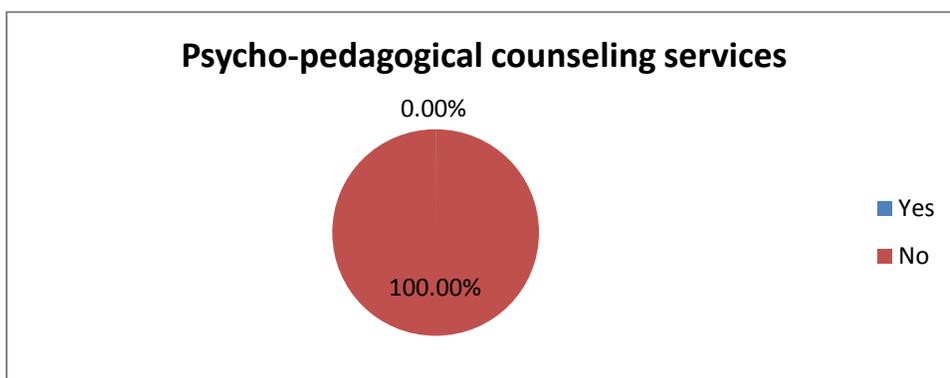
To summarize, these responding 5 teachers believe that the main reason for this negligence of students with mild disabilities, on behalf of the Ministry of education, is the product of their ignorance about the existence of such cases of hidden disabilities that necessitate a direct mediation from their personnel (e.g., pedagogical inspectors). At the first clauses of this research, there was a mentioning of how that there was no official governmental labeling of these conditions of mild disabilities (i.e., emotional disturbance, mild intellectual disabilities, or specific learning disabilities), thus individuals with such sort of conditions cannot be qualified to receive specialized treatment, or receive any governmental aid or funding for that matter.

*13. Have you ever received an educational psychological aid, or being visited by specialized school counsels investigating cases of learning deficiency, emotional disturbance, or intellectual retardation?*

After having confirmed that all responding 6 EFL teachers have never received any sort of official formation about mild disabilities, nor the effects they have on students learning EFL, it is now time to investigate the availability of specialized psychological assistance for teachers seeking counseling with irregularities in the learning behavior of some of their students. Thus the 13<sup>th</sup> question was devised to investigate about the existence of such psycho-pedagogical services.

<i>Options</i>	Total	
	N#	%
<b>Yes</b>	0	0.00%
<b>No</b>	6	100.00%
<b>Total</b>	6	100%

**Table 4.32:** *The availability of psycho-pedagogical counseling services for EFL teachers*



**Figure 4.32:** *The availability of psycho-pedagogical counseling services for EFL teachers*

Having 100% of the questioned EFL teachers, according to table 4.32 and figure 4.32, denying receiving any form of educational psychological counseling can only mean that there is no vacancy in the Algerian educational system for personnel specialized in providing appropriate psychological counseling for both teachers and students. Such utter negligence of the psychological aspect of teaching can only help deteriorating the academic performance of students, suffering from intellectual, emotional, or learning disorders. This provided prospect of our educational system confirms earlier claims in this research about the genuine reasons for constant student-failure not being a mere distortion in the quality of the utilized input, but also a case of anomalies located within the human factor/variable, either productive (i.e., teachers) or receptive (i.e., students), involved in this educational equation.

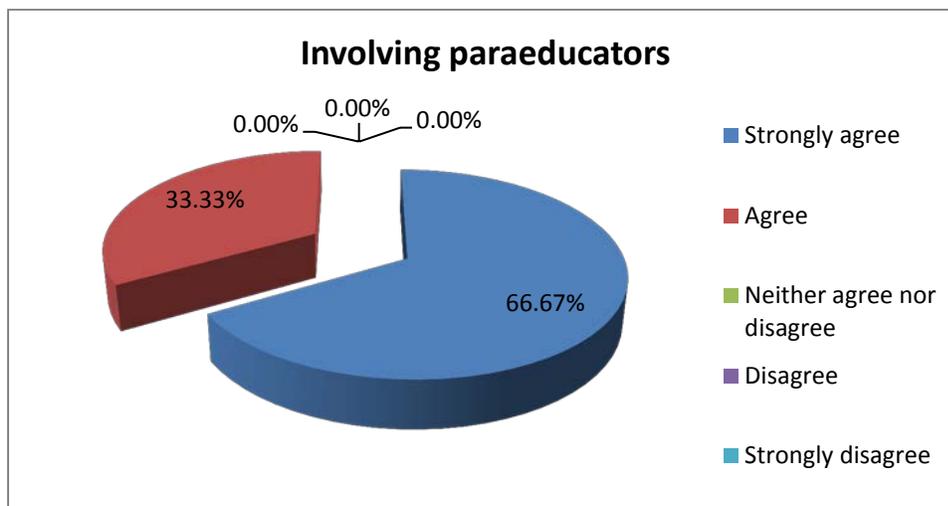
***14. The involvement of paraeducators (educators who are specialized in educational psychology)***

Utilizing Likert’s scale of agreement, the 14<sup>th</sup> questioned allowed the responding teachers to express their attitudes toward the notion of involving personnel who are

specialized in educational psychology, and also capable of devising and implementing remediation inputs for students with learning difficulties. These “paraeducators” will collaborate with both general teachers and parents; in the hope of helping learning disabled students overcome whatever challenges they have.

<i>Options</i>	<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Total</b>
N#	4	2	0	0	0	6
%	66.67%	33.33%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	100%

**Table 4.33:** Attitudes of EFL teachers toward the involvement of paraeducators



**Figure 4.33:** Attitudes of EFL teachers toward the involvement of paraeducators

The demonstrated question 14 results reflect the full support all 6 responding EFL teachers; 33.33% of which said they agree, while the remaining 66.66% admitted they strongly agree, have expressed toward the proposition of dedicating specialized personnel for their aid, handling students with emotional, behavioral, or any other learning deficiencies. Having learned from the questionnaire I that students also approve the idea of paraeducators helping them overcome their learning difficulties, employing such specialists is to be considered as, rather, very plausible remediation to help improve the academic outcome of students, and help them fulfill their true potential.

#### ***4.6 Recapitulation and interpretation of the main findings***

As it has been aforementioned, the main purpose of this study is to unravel some of the mystery about why students tend to underperform in EFL classes, evidently indicated in the findings of this study, which suggest that only 25% of the 60 responding students described their performances in EFL module as being good. The study has narrowed such wide scope of possible causes into investigating the effects mild disabilities have on the performance of EFL learners.

However, in the course of determining the nature of impact MDs have on learning EFL, measuring the accuracy of some other theories about the discrepancy in the individual performance in learning foreign languages, namely the effects of motivation and attitudes. Unexpectedly, the results in questionnaire (I) were that 75.56% of the poor performers expressed affection toward learning English as a foreign language, and another 71.11% of the underperformers admitted being integratively motivated to learn the English language for the sake of it. In other words, negative attitude and weak motivation are not the only causes of weak performance in EFL because they only explain third of the cases of underperformance in this study.

Before proceeding to try and detect the existence of MDs among EFL underperformers, developing a basic knowledge about the medical and family conditions of the responding students was considered essential, for it below par socio-economic conditions invite the emergence of mild disabilities, which are mainly caused by environmental factors (Henley, Ramsey, & Algozzine, 2009). This was proved by the fact that 13.33% of the 45 underperforming students were single parented (either a widowed or a divorced parent), and that 51.2% of them have confirmed living in families with limited financial means.

Nevertheless, using an indirect approach of questioning as an attempt to identify distortions in personality was made, simply, because using direct questions about individuals' personality might too sensitive a case to reply, or even a case of biasness. Therefore, students were merely requested to describe their relationship with their parents and their social interaction preferences. Potential signs of social solitude were present in the 24.44% of the 45 underperforming students admitting to prefer spending spare-time

alone. However, despite having a 75.55% of underperformers claiming to be socially active with either family (33.33%) or friends (42.22%), the healthiness of those social relationships may vary according to the social milieu of interaction and the nature of personal contacts. In other words, some social environments, such as poverty, domestic violence, or inadequate parenting (e.g., single parenting), can cause children to develop hostile attitudes.

Martin Henley and his associates (2009) reckon that identifying mild disabilities among foreign language learners can be a daunting task because the encountered difficulties might be a mere side effect of the unfamiliarity with the language. However, they also suggest that mild deficits most frequently associate with preexisting issues FL learners have with their utilization of their native language. Based on those facts, questionnaire I inquired about EFL learners difficulties using the Arabic language, and resulted of 46.67% of the total 45 underperformers admitting to have difficulties using or learning their native language, i.e., Arabic. As a conclusion, if we consider that these students have had received formal instruction in Arabic (NL) for at least 7 years and being at a cognitively mature age, older than 11 years old children are believed to be at the final stage of cognitive development, i.e., formal operational stage, (Piaget, 1950), it can only be explained as the result of unapparent disability, more accurately a mild disability, preventing them from achieving a mature language proficiency status.

Moreover, Peter Westwood (2009) argues that the effects of mild intellectual retardation can be traced across other academic modules, most notably in mathematics which requisites an intensive use of intellectual processing. Ergo, a portion of questionnaire I was dedicated for that matter, and resulting of 17 EFL underperforming learners admitting to find learning other academic modules such as mathematics either difficult (28.89% of underperformers) or very difficult (8.89%). Having 37.78% of EFL underperformers having difficulties learning other academic entries can only help associating weak performance of some EFL learners with their low intellectual attributes, in other words, having mild intellectual disabilities.

Since relying exclusively on the testimonies of students; whose answers might not be as accurate as hoped for, cannot grant enough credibility to the study, a two exercise

aptitude test in the respondents' NL, thus Arabic, was embodied via questionnaire I. However, with 8 answers required, none of the EFL underachieving students was able to score a perfect 8 to a test that can be said to be easy, none the least. Although a relatively low percentage of 13.33% weak performing students were capable of scoring more than 6 answers, the remaining 66.66% failed to make such impression, having scored less than 5 correct answers, with 24.44% of which had their scores limited between 0 and 2, and 66.22% limited to 3 and 5. If compared to the 86.66% good performers who were able to score more than 6 answers; 33.33% of which having a perfect 8/8 score, most EFL poor performers demonstrate a serious lack of aptitude to learn English as a foreign language. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is a high possibility that some of these students are suffering from mild learning, intellectual, or emotional disabilities (i.e., mild disabilities).

Out of the belief that results from questionnaire I cannot be regarded as exclusively conclusive, questionnaire II was set to consult the views and expertise of EFL teachers, which are considered to be of great value to the attempts of the study to diagnose and determine the possible effects mild disabilities might have on the quality of performance delivered by EFL middle school learners. The questionnaire mainly consisted of a list of characteristics or symptoms that corresponds with the diagnosis of a mild disability, whether emotional, intellectual, or learning disability. Most notably, none of the questioned EFL teachers had any kind of prior knowledge about the concept of mild disability. However, provided with a list of the most visible and prominent symptoms of mild disability, teachers were asked to identify which of those symptoms associated with the learning behavior of their weak performing students.

Initially, all 6 teachers were able to identify at least 4 symptoms of emotional disturbance, from aggressiveness to exaggerated shyness, they believed to be associated with some of their weak performing students, and given the fact that all teachers also confirmed these symptoms to occur frequently for no less than a six month period, we can draw the conclusion that some EFL underperformers suffer from an *emotional disturbance*. On the same vein, a 100% of the questioned EFL teachers proceeded to testify that they witnessed symptoms of *mild intellectual disability* manifested by some of

their weak EFL performing students, such as the slow understanding of the lesson, poor social adaptive skills, and low level of achievement in other academic domains. As the search for the effects of mild disabilities on the performance of EFL learners ensue, teachers ,this time, were debriefed about the existence of what is believed to be the more school related deficiency of the three categories of mild disability, thus is specific learning disabilities. The questionnaire II covers a number of learning disability indicators that are typical of middle school learners (Pierangelo & Giuliani, 2008), which concerns deficits in language, memory, attention, motor skills, and miscellaneous ones. More importantly, all 6 teachers did confirm that most symptoms of the aforementioned deficits are frequently reflected on the educational behavior of some weak performing EFL students. As a result, the source of some EFL learners' poor quality performance is simply their inability to fulfill some learning requisites due to their *learning deficits*.

To conclude, the obtained findings provide a solid ground to the afore-proposed hypothesis of the poor performance of some English as a foreign language learners being the result of them suffering from a mild disability. This fact urges providing teachers with an efficient psycho-pedagogical formation as well as constant assistance, so they can handle situations of students with mild disabilities more effectively, particularly when such assistance is unavailable for neither teachers nor students, according to both questionnaire I and II. More positively, the responses of both EFL teachers and learners mirror a great deal of enthusiasm toward the proposition of integrating specialized personnel, namely paraeducators, to deliver constant support to both teachers and learners having mild disabilities.

***Conclusion:***

Having set the objective of identifying the nature of effects mild disabilities have on the performance of English as foreign language middle school learners, this chapter reframed the methods and procedures followed to achieve such purpose, as well as demonstrating the findings and the significance they have on the initially proposed research questions and hypotheses. In other words, both utilized questionnaires were aiming at gauging and identifying the potential effects emotional, intellectual or other specific learning disorders have on the academic performance of students in EFL classes.

Starting with an examination of other theories of discrepancy in learning foreign languages individual performance, such as that of the effects of motivation and attitudes toward leaning FL, it was concluded that these theories could not provide full explanation to most cases of weak performance in EFL module. Moreover, the diagnosis of potential mild disability conditions extracted from the questionnaire I and II responses, from both middle school students and EFL teachers respectively, have helped building a clear connection between the responding weak performing EFL learners and having a mild disability, which chances of having among good EFL performers were at minimal. These drastic effects, mild disabilities proven to have, were accompanied by a complete nonexistence of specialized psycho-pedagogical assistance, neither for teachers nor for students encountering constant challenges fulfilling their academic requirements. Some of the questioned teachers believe that the main reason for this official negligence of this less fortunate category of students is the lack awareness about this type of “uneasy-to-detect” disabilities.

Finally, the attained results confirm that responding teachers and students, both, amen the proposed remediation of creating vacancies for specialized personnel, i.e., paraeducators or parainstructors, who provide field-support to both teachers and deficient students. However, so to ensure a fulltime monitoring for students, paraeducators should be available at an early educational stage, thus primary school. Therefore, recruiting, at least, a paraeducators per school is essential. As to the initial assumptions of this study, the findings have established a concrete association between weak performance in EFL middle school classes and mild disabilities.

# ***Chapter 5 Recommendations and Mandatory Instructions for educating students with mild disabilities***

## **5.1 General Recommendations for educating students with MDs**

### **5.1.1 Administrative recommendations:**

### **5.1.2 Pedagogical Recommendations**

## **5.2 Mandatory Instructions for teaching students with mild Disabilities**

### **5.2.1 The Instruction of Students with Mild Intellectual Disabilities**

### **5.2.2 The Instruction of Students with Emotional Disturbance**

### **5.2.3 Specific Learning Disabilities and Language Learning**

## ***5 Recommendations and Mandatory Instructions for Educating Students with Mild Disabilities***

### ***Introduction***

It is well known that being an English as foreign language teacher is no easy task, for that they are constantly struggling to find proper means for “motivating” and “make understand” some students who seem to never do so. Subsequently, the study in hand was proposed as an inquiry about whether this serious lack of performance in EFL module is strictly the result of either a severe lack of motivation and negativity of attitude toward learning EFL, or a mere distortion in the instructional behavior, be it the teacher’s input or the whole curriculum. However, the recent ministerial “enhancements” applied to the syllabuses of EFL on all levels have proven futile, which is supported by the attained data (75% of the investigated students’ sample had grades below 11 which is a weak standard for developing EFL proficiency), and neither motivation nor attitude was recorded as sufficient to explain all cases of irregularities in learning foreign languages. Hence, the study carried the proposition that there are invisible disabilities impeding students’ academic progress not only in learning EFL, but in other classes as well. After proving that there is an association between mild disabilities and some underperforming EFL learners, the main concern has shifted toward proposing remedial recommendations for officials to follow, and toward proposing applicable strategies that general school EFL teachers can employ in teaching students with mild disabilities.

### ***5.1 General Recommendations for educating students with MDs***

Based on the presented findings of this research, it is possible to initiate a number of recommendations concerning the counter measures needed to limit the damage caused by mild disabilities on the academic performance of students, not only that of English as foreign language learning, but other educational areas as well. The recommendations are mainly clustered into two subcategories. First are recommendations that are of an administrative nature directed toward education authorities, for the sake of providing an efficient set of psycho-pedagogical supporting protocols available to general education

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teachers. Second are recommendations that are related to the nature of pedagogical procedures to be established, so granting students with chronic learning difficulties the opportunity to better adapt, if not overcome, to those challenges. As a disclaimer, it ought to be reckoned that some of the proposed recommendations are in fact inspired and adopted from the American educational system which has a vast experience in teaching students with special needs, extending to the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Henley, Ramsey, & Algozzine, 2009, p. 3). After all, it is not an option to follow the model set by Adolf Hitler during the Second World War, in eliminating the “retarded ones”.

### **5.1.1 Administrative recommendations**

- Most urgently, the ministry of national education is recommended to consider creating vacancies for paraeducators who can be responsible for providing at-field psych-educational support to both teachers and students, seeking assistance. For instance, teachers can utilize this support to find proper diagnosis to the their chronically poor performing students, so they can adjust their instructional behavior to a better effect on the academic performance of those students, and this procedure is most likely to involve the expertise of those paraeducators. Furthermore, paraeducators can involve directly by reviewing cases of poor academic performances, in search for potential cases of emotional, intellectual, or specific learning disabilities.
- Since early diagnosis of mild disabilities can help increasing the efficiency of the supporting counter-measures, in terms of strengthening the mildly disabled individual’s areas of difficulty (e.g., reading, writing, or calculating), it is recommended that paraeducators should be dispatched at the initial levels of education, thus primary schools. A further motive for posting paraeducators at the level of primary schools is that the expectations for students with mild disabilities to proceed into higher education levels are minimal, given their inferior academic skills.
- In order to grant a constant and effective treatment to students with disabilities, it is recommended that officials consider integrating a special education classroom within general education schools, with paraeducators on top, as the responsible instructors.

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In these special education classrooms, students with learning disabilities can receive proper remediation through the intensive treatment paraeducators can apply.

- Due to the lack of knowledge the questioned EFL teachers, in questionnaire II, have demonstrated toward mild disabilities, it is vital that teachers, in general, engage in informative seminars about the characteristics of students with mild disabilities and the most effective strategies that a general education EFL teacher can utilize to help their students overcome the obstacles imposed by their mild disabilities.
- It is also recommended that national education authorities establish a collaborated effort with the available individuals with special needs institutions and agencies, by allowing them to conduct regular official visits to general education schools in search for children with potential undiagnosed disabilities, most likely mild, and allowing them to have meetings with both teachers and students, in attempt to familiarize them with the symptoms of mild disabilities, and encourage them to engage in their special programs.
- Given the extreme need for the services of paraeducators, it is recommended that the government establish specialized institution or centers for the formation of paraeducational personnel. Curricula used by these institutions must be dedicated to develop an extensive knowledge of both pedagogy and psychology.
- It is recommended that the ministry of national education launch a national informative campaign about the characteristics and effects of mild disabilities, so parents can take action about their children whom they suspect to have a mild disability. It should be noted that the diagnosis of learning disabilities is not constrained by the exposure to school environment, but rather the learning activity is what highlights such individual anomalies. Therefore, parents can still sort out those irregularities by involving their children in early home-education programs.
- It is recommended that education authorities initiate a national scale census for gauging the actual effects mild disabilities on the academic performance of students.
- Due to the absence of official recognition of this phenomenon that carry such drastic effects on the educational productivity of many children, it is recommended that the

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government issue a set of legislations that define the educational rights and labels for children with mild disabilities.

### ***5.1.2 Pedagogical Recommendations***

- The aforementioned outcomes of this research have revealed that there is a state of negligence toward the special needs of some students who are unreasonably judged by their physical appearance and attributes as qualified for general learning, requiring no further specialized care. Consequently, attempts of teachers to improve the academic level of these students usually prove futile. Thus, it is recommended that teachers develop, themselves, a solid knowledge about the different symptoms non-physical disabilities have, which might provide a valid explanation to the lack of achievement some students have, particularly when official pedagogical seminars dedicate no consideration toward emotional or intellectual irregularities
- If the condition of providing a paraeducational support is fulfilled, it is recommended that mild disabilities with the same criteria of learning challenges receive a special customized input that focuses mainly on remedying their learning weaknesses because though students might have different kinds of disabilities, they might still demonstrate the same patterns of learning inability.
- Since the proposition of including paraeducators in the educational system, general classroom teachers will need to “do it all themselves.” In other words, teachers will need to dedicate extra sessions for implementing supporting exercises that might help mildly disabled students compensate for their lack of English as a foreign language learning aptitude.
- It is also recommended that teachers give special assignments to students with potential learning disabilities, which focuses on helping those students improve their areas of difficulty, such as spelling or vocabulary.
- For students with emotional irregularities, it is recommended that teachers make home-visits to families of the students or their neighbors, investigating the motives for such constant disordered behavior.
- Given the fact that students with mild disabilities need an extensive care, it is recommended that teachers schedule regular meetings with the parents whose direct

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involvement is essential that the mildly disabled child receive the most suitable and constant treatment possible.

- Concerning students with emotional and behavioral disturbance, teachers are recommended to develop a more intimate relation, of course based on carefully considered boundaries, with this particular category of students because in most cases, the behavior reflected on these students is the result of family negligence or emotional traumas, and close friendly relationship is what would grant teachers access to the thinking of these uneasy-to-trust individuals. In other words, teachers should build a firm rapport with their students, by befriending them and getting better insights to their feelings.
- EFL teachers should cooperate with their colleagues in the teaching panel, so they can exchange information about the weaknesses that their students suffer from. Subsequently, they can devise a joint program for improving the overall learning attributes of the learner, given the fact three sessions per week can never be sufficient for an EFL teacher to address the learning difficulties of all of his/her weak performing students.
- It is recommended that teachers integrate social interactive activities in his/her instructional input, so students with MDs are provided with more opportunities to socialize.
- It has been mentioned in previous chapters that students with mild disabilities tend to be oversensitive toward the views and expectations of others, thus teachers will need to constantly motivate students with MDs, in order to try and elevate the level their self-achievement-expectancy.
- Nonetheless, the coming section is set to provide better insights to the teaching strategies, teachers can utilize with each of the three categories. It should be mentioned that these strategies are recommended for the “inclusive” teaching of students with mild disabilities. By inclusive teaching, it is meant that teaching students with special needs in general education classrooms, rather than the special education ones, because in some countries, such as the USA, general education classrooms also do contain special ones for teaching students with special needs,

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including those of mild disabilities. However, in the Algerian education system, there is no remarked existence of such merging of the two forms of education.

### ***5.2 Mandatory Instructions for teaching students with mild Disabilities***

#### ***5.2.1 The Instruction of Students with Mild Intellectual Disabilities***

With the absence of official recognition of mild intellectual disabilities as being qualified for special educational programs, teachers will have to solely confront such circumstances. Thus a solid knowledge about the basic needs and instructional strategies for this category is quite vital. Algozzine and Ysseldyke (1995) explain that intellectual deficient needs special tutoring for improving basic academic skills (i.e., reading, writing, and arithmetic), communication (i.e., language and speech), and behavior (i.e., attention to tasks and disruptiveness), such skill that are required instinctively by their peers. However, the teaching of such basic skills represents a mutual ground that most other approaches imply with all three categories of mild disability. Onwards, Robert Algozzine and his coauthors (2009) suggest a comprehensive overview of the attitudes and preliminary procedures that a teachers should develop concerning this category:

- Teachers should expect to see progress; a mild intellectual disability is not a permanent, unalterable condition.
- Consider that many students come to school without readiness skills; don't make false assumption about them knowing what you are talking about, thus seeking confirmation is prerequisite.
- Identify student's level of cognitive functioning/development (i.e., preoperational, concrete, or operational), and match the instructional input to the learner's characteristics, accordingly.
- Always connect abstract notion to life experiences.
- Avoid dull, repetition, by maintaining a sense of novelty in lessons because type of student can easily be distracted.
- Provide maximum opportunities for learning in the least restrictive environment.
- Remember that the label "*mentally retarded*" is demanding and promotes stereotyping.

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- Keep in mind that there is more to intelligence than the narrow range of skills assessed via IQ tests.
- Insist on a measure of adaptive behavior before evaluating a student as mentally retarded.
- Provide students with functional, real life learning experiences.

### ***5.2.1.1 A Clearer Teacher-talk***

Robinson (1989) suggest that students may get lost with the glimpse of all those unnecessary antics that teachers employ, such is false starts, repetitions, lack of clarity, and philosophical language. Ergo, she recommends the use of *advance organizers* to help maintain students focus, and thus ensuring proper perception to the input. The following guidelines summarize some of the effective steps to be sued as advance organizers:

- Alert students to the transition to a new activity.
- Identify topics or activities students will do.
- Provide an outline or other organizational framework.
- Clarify teacher's expectations for student participations.
- Provide background information regarding how the new lesson relates to previous activities.
- State the concepts to be learned.
- Give examples about the taught concepts.
- Highlight the relevance of the topic.
- Introduce new vocabulary.
- Specify the desired general outcomes of the activity. (1989, p. 149)

### ***5.2.1.2 The Direct Teaching of Thinking Skills***

As a remediation to the cognitive developmental retardation student with mild intellectual disabilities suffer from, many educational psychologists do prose a more direct approach of teaching, in attempt to haste the process of cognitive maturation. This sort of procedure is often known as a *metacognitive* instruction. Such assumptions were carried by the likes of Goldstein (1974) who believed that the direct teaching of problem-solving skills would be of greater help than that of trial and error, or any other form of

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learning that it is based on higher-order thinking skills (Bloom's taxonomy, 1956). Goldstein's social approach to teaching was based on a *logical inductive strategy*, where learners are taught a hierarchical procedure for solving problems (as quoted in Pierangelo, & Giuliani, 2008, p. 165). This strategy requires students to become familiar with how to label, detail, infer, predict, verify, and generalize. Throughout the different stages of the course, the teacher will need to remain active by:

1. Telling student what is to be learned
2. Telling students what are they expected to do
3. Calling on student to response
4. Evaluating student answers
5. Immediately correcting wrong answers.

Adversely, Goldstein reckons that a teacher-centered approach can be disadvantageous to the intellectual maturation of students, in the sense that it promotes for a dependent attitude, and thus crippling students' cognitive growth. Early encouragement for children to utilize their creative abilities can help activating those abilities on an early age, or at least helping them cope with their peers, to a certain extent.

### ***5.2.1.3 Language teaching and students with mild intellectual disabilities: reading***

Since reading resembles more intellectually complex aspect of language, students with mild intellectual disabilities have always struggled to perform this ability. Ramsey and her associates (2009) suggested that the reason the reason for these students struggle is the phonics-oriented reading teaching approaches. It is well known that phonics depends on the cognitive abilities performed on the level of the left-hemisphere (language are lateralized to the left-hemisphere). Phonics requires teaching the sounds of the alphabet, how those sounds blend to make syllabuses, and how the combination of those syllabuses formulates words (Britannica, 2012). For reading new words, learners relying on the phonics method will need to reverse the phonic procedure by decoding the word and *sounding out* each letter before recoding it to its auditory form. Meaning, this approach to reading requires the use of the individual's auditory, analytical, sequential abilities, such that intellectually deficient people cannot manage. As a result, the like of

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Marie Carbo (1987) proposed a more *global* approach, one that relies on implementing within students linguistic patterns of use so that can rely on the global meaning of the discourse. Carbo describes global readers as being able "...to read most rapidly through such activities as writing stories, reading books of their own choosing, engaging in choral reading, writing and performing in plays, and listening to tape recordings of interesting and well written books". Writing for the division of mental retardation council for exceptional children, H. L. Mandelbaum (1989) reviews a number of strategies that he thinks are best suited for teaching reading skills to students with mild intellectual disabilities, where the core of these strategies is combining functional reading along with interesting reading materials. The principles of effective reading teaching have been summarized by Mandelbaum as follows:

1. **Demonstrate rather than tell.** The teacher and student discuss, read, and answer questions together about a story on the student's reading level.
2. **Provide for successful practice.** Make sure students use reading materials that will sustain at least 80 percent success rate.
3. **Use direct instruction.** Teacher-led group instruction should demonstrate the skill to be learned, provide practice with feedback, and allow for independent student practice.
4. **Plan for high levels of task involvement.** Reading in unison, choral reading, and high-interest readings improve fluency and comprehension.
5. **Ignore errors that do not matter. All errors are not equal.** Every word does not have to be read correctly. Focus only on errors that change the meaning of a sentence. Provide sufficient time for a student to analyze a word and decode.
6. **Give independent assignments that relate to the lesson.** Most workbooks and dittos focus on isolated skills. Avoid the drudgery of worksheets unless relevant and necessary.
7. **Integrate subject matter.** Use themes of webbings to cluster concepts.
8. **Measure behavior change.** Plot and graph reading improvement in terms of median of number of words read correctly each minute.

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9. **Provide opportunities to learn achievement formats.** Formats vary widely, and students need practice with the procedure that will be used to evaluate their skills.

### ***5.2.2 The Instruction of Students with Emotional Disturbance:***

Most of the challenges that emotional disturbance impose on teacher are classroom management issues that requires the teacher to amend his/her instructional behavior to a flexible stable, able to cope with the needs and “disturbance” caused by those emotionally disturbed. However, teachers need to accumulate a full understanding of the different characteristics and symptoms each emotional disorder has, so they could determine the genuine nature of the student’s condition. Thus, teachers will need to investigate into the medical and social history of the child and his family.

#### ***5.2.2.1 Guidelines for teaching student with emotional disturbance:***

It has been aforementioned what cases of emotional disturbance need, more than anything else, is a genuine understanding and open-mindedness on behalf of their instructor. It is up to the teacher to develop and sustain a mutual relationship of respect and trust with this population of his students. Sometimes, teachers can be closer to these children more than their parents have ever been, thus compensating them for the lack of passion and warmth they have been missing. However in order to reach a state of mutual respect and trust, teachers need to develop certain attitudes toward this category. Henley et al., (2009) presents the following instructions for how teachers can efficiently manage those self-conflicted students of theirs.

- Recognize the difference between disturbing and disturbed behavior.
- Look for classroom routines, lessons, and discipline practices that may contribute to behavior problems.
- Consider diet, allergies, and other physical causes for disturbing behavior.
- With hyperactive students, change classroom routines before going along with drug treatment.
- Trust is the basis for social-emotional growth. Work to develop a trusting relationship with disturbing students.

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- Use behavior modification in a systematic fashion. Don't use behavior modification as a way for rationalizing punishment.
- Make a home and neighborhood visit of each student in your class and require adaptive skills required for environments outside of school.
- Present lessons in a format that connects to the personal experience of your students.
- Assess the impact of such real-life issues as teenage pregnancy, drugs, and depression.
- Model the language and behavior that you want to foster in your students.

### ***5.2.2.2 Effective Classroom management for Students with Emotional Disturbance:***

Since learners with emotional disturbance represent a direct threat to the teacher authority in the classroom through their disruptive behavior, which will most likely disturb the course of the lesson, if it is allowed. Therefore the teacher need develop a precautionary strategy through which order can be preserved. Hallahan et al., (2009) propose a set of what can be as effective tactics as being able to sustain order in classroom, As well as good communication with students.

- Being alert to everything that is going on in the room
- Being able to do two essential things at the same time (instruct and control)
- Avoiding dead-spots and poor continuity within a lesson and during transitions
- Maintaining a good pace and momentum to the lesson
- Taking into account compatibility of student personalities when arranging working groups
- Conveying positive expectations of what students will achieve
- Giving clear instruction and checking for understanding
- Establishing a set of positive classroom rules with known consequences for non-compliance.

### ***5.2.2.3 Language Teaching and Emotional Disturbance: Shyness.***

Since shyness cause no effects to the teacher's course of teachers, most students with *chronic* case of shyness slip unnoticed, but this deficiency has been proven able of damaging the individual's social and intellectual development, particularly when the

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learning activity requires a certain deal of interaction, such as foreign language learning. El Sayed Dadour (2008) argues that shyness does not represent an issue as long as it does not develop into a habit that interferes with the individual's social and educational life. Further, he defines shyness as the state of "defiance about entering school situations, discomfort, inhibition in the presence of others, exaggerated self-concern, and negative self-concepts" (Dadour, 2008, p. 10). Related to teaching EFL, the use of communicative approach for teaching foreign languages has become predominant nowadays, where language learning is believed to be the result of social interaction that takes place between students. Now, the question is how the teacher can get this type of students to engage in his/her communicative activities. After a series interviews with a number of experienced teachers, Johnson (1956) was able to compile a number of strategies to aid teachers make their shy students overcome their condition to become more involved with classroom activities.

### **1. *Enhance self-esteem and confidence:***

- Take every opportunity to praise every learner.
- Give them recognition by talking to them during group session, looking directly at them from time to time while using their first names to designate their groups.
- Give them responsibilities by assigning them important tasks.
- Find areas or activities in which they can feel secure enough to participate.
- Ask for their advice when they feel secure enough to participate.
- Ask for their advice when this may be helpful.
- Give them objective descriptions of their progress in learning.
- Help them when they need help to avoid failure.

2. ***Encourage contact with peers:*** place withdrawn learners in group activities with friendly peers, or seat them near outgoing classmates.

3. ***Gently move them toward participation:*** allow them to remain relatively quiet at first and yet to participate in the group.

4. ***Other methods:*** discuss with them the importance of participating in activities and sharing with peers, help them to feel secure in the classroom, and develop a climate of relaxed calmness. (as quoted in Dadour, 2008, p. 15)

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### ***5.2.3 Specific Learning Disabilities and Language Learning***

Given the wide array of educational domains that specific learning disabilities can damage (e.g., mathematics), it has been opted to concentrate on the different strategies for teaching language to students with speech disabilities. *Speech disorders* manifest themselves as difficulties in producing speech sounds correctly or delivering spoken words clearly and with appropriate rate and fluency. These problems are often referred to as difficulties with articulation and phonology and may be caused by physical factors, by hearing loss, or by cognitive impairment. *Language disorders* are related to significant difficulties in processing language that is heard (i.e., *receptive language problems*) and/or formulating and expressing one's own ideas or verbal responses clearly and accurately (i.e., *expressive language problems*). It is not only students who struggle, but their teachers as well, particularly when there is no proper support in hand. There for this element will attempt to provide some headlines about strategies that can be of some help in teaching language (foreign as well) to those misfortuned language learning disabled youngsters. Nonetheless, before getting into that teachers need to sustain a number of positive attitude and instructional behaviors that can help would grant a better chance of success in implanting the input.

#### ***5.2.3.1 Involving Students in the Preparation of Lessons:***

Pierangelo and Giuliani (2008) suggest that students with LD learn best with a carefully structured academic lesson, one where the teacher explains to his/her student what they are expected to have in the current lesson and create a logical link up between the coming content and that has been presented in prior-lesson. Such belief was demonstrated through a number of teaching related practices that Reid and Lienemann (2006) recommend for facilitating the teaching process:

- *Discuss and establish behavioral expectations:* Describe how students are expected to behave during the lesson. For example, tell students that they may talk quietly to their neighbors as they do their seatwork or they may raise their hands to get your attention.
- *Offer an advance organizer:* Prepare students for the day's lesson by quickly summarizing the order of the various activities planned. Explain, for example, that a

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review of the previous lesson will be followed by new information and that both group and independent work will be expected.

- *Take time out to review previous lessons:* Review information about previous lessons on this topic. For example, remind students that yesterday's lesson focused on learning how to regroup in subtraction. Review several problems before describing the current lesson.
- *Be very clear on materials needed:* Identify all materials that the students will need during the lesson rather than leaving them to figure out the required materials on their own. For example, specify that students need their journals and pencils for journal writing or their crayons, scissors, and colored paper for an art project.
- *Make instructions, choices, and scheduling as easy as possible:* The simpler the expectations communicated to an LD student, the more likely she will comprehend and complete them in a timely and productive manner.

### **5.2.3.2 General Strategies for teaching Language Skills in general classrooms**

In situations where no special supporting educational programs for students with SpLDs, teachers will need to solely step up, and provide these students with the best instruction they can, such that can satisfy the needs of different types of learning disabled students, which is the very case of our educational system where no official recognition of such disabilities. Pierangelo and Giuliani (2008) have compiled a number of strategies that is thought to be effective for teaching reading, writing, spelling, handwriting, and phonics

#### **5.2.3.2.1 Reading**

To help students with LD who are poor readers improve their reading comprehension skills, teachers should try the following instructional practices:

- *Provide silent reading time.* Establish a fixed time each day for silent reading. Examples of potentially effective approaches are D.E.A.R.(Drop Everything and Read) and Sustained Silent Reading
- *Provide follow-along reading.* Ask the student to read a story silently while listening to other students or the teacher read the story aloud to the entire class.

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- *Provide partner reading activities.* Pair the student with LD with another student who is a strong reader. The partners take turns reading orally and listening to each other.
- *Teach the student how to make a storyboard.* Ask the student to make storyboards that illustrate the sequence of main events in a story.
- *Schedule storytelling.* Schedule storytelling sessions where the student can retell a story that the student has read recently.
- *Schedule playacting.* Schedule playacting sessions where the student can role-play different characters in a favorite story.
- *Keep a word bank.* Keep a word bank or dictionary of new or “hard-to-read” sight-vocabulary words.
- *Play board games for reading comprehension.* Play board games that provide practice with target reading comprehension skills or sight-vocabulary words.
- *Schedule computer games for reading comprehension.* Schedule computer time for the student to have drill-and-practice with sight vocabulary words.
- *Utilize recorded books.* These materials, available from many libraries, can stimulate interest in traditional reading and can be used to reinforce and complement reading lessons.
- *Have “backup” materials for home use.* Make available to students a second set of books and materials that they can keep at home and use there.
- *Provide summary materials.* Allow and encourage students to use published book summaries, synopses, and digests of major reading assignments to review (not replace) reading assignments.

### **5.2.3.2.2 Phonics**

To help students with LD master rules of phonics, the following approaches were proposed:

- *Teach the student mnemonics for phonics.* Teach the student mnemonics that provide reminders about hard-to-learn phonics rules (e.g., “When two vowels go walking, the first does the talking.”)

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- *Teach word families.* Teach the student to recognize and read word families that illustrate particular phonetic concepts (e.g., /ph/ sounds, *at-bat-cat*).
- *Provide and play board games for phonics.* Have students play board-games, such as bingo, that allow them to practice phonetically irregular words.
- *Use computer games for phonics.* Use a computer to provide opportunities for students to drill and practice with phonics or grammar lessons.
- *Use picture-letter charts.* Use these for students who know sounds but do not know the letters that go with them.

### 5.2.3.2.3 Writing

Using the suggested strategies, language teachers can make full advantage of written expression activities to enhance their weak performing students writing skills.

- *Provide standards for writing assignments.* Identify and teach the student classroom standards for acceptable written work, such as format and style.
- *Teach students to recognize parts of a story.* Teach the student how to describe the major parts of a story (e.g., plot, main characters, setting, conflict, and resolution). Use a storyboard with parts listed for this purpose.
- *Establish a post office.* Establish a post office in the classroom and provide students with opportunities to write, mail, and receive letters to and from their classmates and teacher.
- *Teach visualization.* Ask the students to close their eyes and visualize a paragraph that the teacher reads aloud. Another variation of this technique is to ask a student to describe a recent event while the other students close their eyes and visualize what is being said as a written paragraph.
- *Require students to proofread their own work.* Require that the students proofread their work before turning in written assignments. Provide the students with a list of items to check when proofreading their own work.

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### 5.2.3.2.4 Spelling

Having learned earlier how devastating can weak spelling can be, language teachers give special focus to strengthening their students spelling, and hence their overall writing abilities. Using the following tactics can help achieving that:

- *Use everyday examples of difficult spelling words.* Take advantage of everyday events to teach difficult spelling words in context. For example, ask a student eating a cheese sandwich to spell *sandwich*.
- *Assign frequently used words.* Assign spelling words that the student routinely uses in speech each day.
- *Have students keep a dictionary of misspelled words.* Ask the student to keep a personal dictionary of frequently misspelled words.
- *Use partner spelling activities.* Pair the student with another student. Ask the partners to quiz each other on the spelling of new words. Encourage both students to guess the correct spelling.
- *Use manipulatives.* Use cutout letters or other manipulatives to spell out hard-to-learn words.
- *Use color-coded letters.* Color code different letters in hard-to-spell words (e.g., *receipt*).
- *Use movement activities.* Combine movement activities with spelling lessons (e.g., jump rope while spelling words out loud).
- *Use word banks.* Write frequently misspelled words on “3 × 5” index cards and sort them alphabetically.

### 5.2.3.2.5 Handwriting

Personal experiences have proven that handwriting if remain untreated, the damage can become permanent. Ergo, assisting students overcome their difficulties with manuscripts and cursive writing must be a top priority for every language teacher. The following strategies can prove beneficial for that particular purpose:

## **Recommendations and Mandatory Instructions**

- *Provide individual chalkboards.* Ask the student to practice copying and erasing the target words on a small, individual chalkboard. Two students can be paired to practice their target words together.
- *Provide quiet places for handwriting.* Provide the student with a special “quiet place” (e.g., a table outside the classroom) to complete handwriting assignments.
- *Teach spacing words on a page.* Teach the students to use a finger to measure how much space to leave between each word in a written assignment.
- *Have the student use special writing paper.* Ask the student to use special paper with vertical lines to learn to space letters and words on a page.

### ***Conclusion***

After having had confirmed that there was a complete lack of psychological support provided to teachers, recommending a number of remedial suggestions was thus judged insufficient because, realistically, teachers probably will have to wait for quite a while before receiving any sort of sensible guidance helping them manage the psychological peculiarities of some of their students. Therefore, not only future recommendations were included, but further mandatory instructions for general classroom EFL teacher to use as well. It has been aforementioned that each category of mild disabilities has its particular ramifications, and thus the provided instructions have been labelled accordingly.

Nevertheless, it is highly doubted that teachers will succeed to equilibrate their priorities between sustaining focus on the general course of the official syllabus and embodying a supportive role for students who are suspected of being mildly disabled. Therefore, previous recommendations about the integration of a new psycho-pedagogical variable to the bi-equation; i.e., student-teacher, of teaching, so it can provide field support to both other parties, teachers and students, are to be considered of the essence. It was also proposed earlier that this role is to be occupied by efficiently trained personnel in both general teaching and educational psychology, these personal are also known as paraeducators or parainstructors. Paraeducators are believed to carry the objective of delivering psychological counselling for teachers and students, alike, not only concerning

## **Recommendations and Mandatory Instructions**

school-related issues or pedagogical complications, but also every other life aspect of the child, who is at critical age where every incident is set to shape up the rest of his/her life.

As a conclusion, it is safe to assume that the nonexistence of psycho-pedagogical support and awareness is a contributing factor to the high rates of EFL low performers. Have it been there a psychological support as proposed, teachers would have a better chance of effectively dealing with students having anomalies in their learning aptitudes, such as those caused by mild disabilities. Ergo, education officials are urged to take proper actions toward this defection in the educational system that is estimated to be a main factor of, also, the high rates of dropping-out of school. For instance, the case of students with undiagnosed mild disabilities reduces significantly the chances of educational success these students might have, as a result to their “below-standard” learning properties.

# *General Conclusion*

### *General Conclusion*

Having designated the classical English as foreign language teaching method, grammar translation method (GMT), as the main contributor to the poor performance of students, the officials of the national education decided it was time to abandon such “outdated” method in favor of a more trendy EFL teaching approach, thus competency based approach (CBA). However, as the name suggests, the main objective of any CBA syllabus is to try and develop the learners’ individual competence in communicating with the foreign language. In other words, it is centered and based on the learner’s individual aptitudes to learn EFL, so he/she can adapt him/herself to the communicative requisites of using the foreign language. Unexpectedly, high levels of English as foreign language poor performances have maintained their prominence, as it was recorded in the findings of this research. This raises quite a few questions about the reason for failing to attain results similar to those of first world countries applying the very same mechanism of teaching the FL. A possible answer to that is there are certain essential factors that have been overlooked, where a potential malfunctioning might lie. Namely, these overlooked factors are hypothesized to be students, teachers, and teaching environment. Nevertheless, the conducted research is concerned with the first factor, i.e., students, in which it proposes a potential explanation for the poor performance of some EFL learners. This explanation evolves about the hypothesis that some of these learners are suffering from undetected disabilities that prevent them fulfilling the educational promise they are expected to reach. There is an alternative name for those uneasy to detect disabilities, which is mild disability that was this study’s proposed explanation for the weak performance of some EFL learners.

Even though the concept of mild disability is not a brand new concept, officially recognized by the American government in the legislation IDEA (1991), all efforts to find a mentioning of it, in either official governmental publications or national press materials, were futile. Therefore, the first chapter of the work was dedicated to present a clear overview of some of the main definitions and characteristics of mild disabilities, as well as including a brief mentioning of the three main categories of mild disability. According to M. Henley and his associates (2009), the array of mild disabilities enfolds three chief classifications: mild intellectual

## **General Conclusion**

disabilities (MID), emotional disturbance (ED), and specific learning disabilities (SpLD). These three chief categories were extensively examined in chapter three, which portrayed the various symptoms that each category is recognized for. In addition, some of the most common and language related mild disabilities, and that what has given the opportunity to examine the effects some mild disabilities can have on developing language proficiency, both native and foreign.

After having reviewed some of the most prominent literature about mild disabilities and discrepancy in the individual performance of learning FLs, a field-work was needed to gauge the validity of the proposed hypothesis about how the weak performance of some EFL middle school learners was the result of them having a mild disability, preventing from having good performances of the sort. Falling in favor of the earlier mentioned suggestions, the findings from both used questionnaires, I for students and II for teachers, demonstrated a strong connection between EFL underperforming middle school learners and a number of symptoms associated with the three chief categories of mild disability. Despite these positive signs of mild disabilities involvement with the EFL weak performances delivered by some students, the attained data indicated that there was a complete lack of psycho-pedagogical support that was confirmed by both students and teachers. Above all, it was teachers' utter ignorance about the nature and ramifications of these conditions, i.e., mild disabilities that set off tone to the level of negligence, this category of students are encountering.

As a remediation, the major headline was that of involving specialized personnel who are specialized in both special education didactics and educational psychology. It was also recommended that paraeducators vacancies should be created on the level of primary schools because early diagnosis of learning disabilities, intellectual inferiority, and behavioral anomalies would generate better chances of remediation success, and that most mildly disabled children are estimated to fail qualifying for advanced levels of education. To summarize, the strong association between mild disabilities and weak performance in EFL module, which was demonstrated through the findings of the field work, dictates an urgent intervention form the education authorities to try and limit the damage caused by such uneasy-to-detect deficiencies.

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# *Appendices*

## *The Effects of Mild Disabilities on the Performance of Middle School English as a Foreign Language Learners: field study*

The given questionnaire is a part of a study that is investigating the potential effects of mild disabilities on the performance of English as a foreign language middle school learner.

### *إستبيان*

#### *I. معلومات شخصية: ضع علامة X على خيار واحد فقط*

1. الجنس:  ذكر  انثى
  2. حدد فنتك العمرية:  من 7 إلى 11 سنة  من 11 سنة فما فوق
  3. صف مستوى عائلتك المعيشي:  ممتاز  جيد  متدهور  سيئ
  4. صف الحالة العائلية لوالديك:  متزوجان  مطلقان  أحدهما ارملة.
  5. هل سبق لك ان شخصت بإعاقة:  نعم  لا
  6. اذا كانت اجابتك بنعم, حدد طبيعة الإعاقة:  جسدية  ذهنية  إعاقات أخرى
- II. أسئلة حول الدراسة الرجاء وضع علامة (X) على اختيار واحد فقط (ماعدا سؤال 7)*

1- كيف تصف درجاتك (علاماتك) في اللغة الانجليزية:

- ممتازة (16-20)  جيدة جدا (14-16)  جيدة (13-14)  ضعيفة (اقل من 10)
- حسن (12-13)  متوسط (10-11)

2- كيف تصف شعورك حيال (اتجاه) تعلم اللغة الانجليزية:

- تحبه جدا  تحبه  لا تحبه ولا تكرهه  تكرهه  تكرهه بشدة

3- هل انت تدرس اللغة الانجليزية لأنه:

- يجب عليك ذلك  للحصول على نقطة جيدة  لأنك تريد تعلم اللغة الانجليزية

4- هل تجري احاديث مطولة مع والديك؟

- دائما  الكثير من الاحيان  احيانا  القليل من الاحيان  ابدا

5- كيف تفضل قضاء أوقات فراغك؟

- ممارسة نشاطات مع أصدقائك (اللعبة، الدردشة...)

قضاء الوقت بمفردك ( ألعاب الفيديو، مشاهدة التلفاز...)

- 6- هل لديك صعوبات في استعمال أو تعلم اللغة العربية؟  نعم  لا

7- إذا كانت الإجابة بنعم, فما هي طبيعة هاته الصعوبات؟ (يمكنك وضع X على أكثر من خيار)

صعوبة في القراءة  التعبير الكتابي  لإملاء  لمفردات

8- كيف تجد تعلم المواد الأخرى كالرياضيات:

سهل جد  سهل  لا سهل ولا صعب  صعب  جد صعب

9- كيف تجد تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية:

سهل جد  سهل  لاسهل ولا صعب  صعب  جد صعب

10- هل سبق لك ان تلقيت اي مساعدة خاصة لمعالجة صعوباتك في تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية من قبل

معلمك أو مختص؟  نعم  لا

11- ما رأيك في التحصل على مساعدة مختص لتعلم اللغة الانجليزية:

أوافق بشدة  أوافق  حيادي  عارض  عارض بشدة

12- حاول ان تجيب عن الاسئلة التالية:

a. أكمل الفراغ بوضع كلمة لها نفس وزن (سجع) الكلمات السابقة على الفراغ.

مثال: حمام- يمام- كلام- ... نضع الكلمة أمام

1. صفاء-رجاء-سناء-.....
2. شمس-همس-لمس-.....
3. ضباب-رياب-عذاب-.....
4. جبان-حصان-ليان-.....

b. كل سطر يحتوي على أربع كلمات, ثلاث كلمات منها تتشابه بعض الشيء أما الكلمة الرابعة فتختلف

عنهم, ضع سطر تحت الكلمة المختلفة.

مثال: should- would- mood- could:

1. Lee- bee- see – he
2. Same- game –name- him
3. Book- not- moon- wood
4. Know- knife- nose- knew

*Thank you for your help!*

*Best of Luck*

***The Effects of Mild Disabilities on the Performance of Middle School English as a Foreign Language Learners: field study***

The given questionnaire is a part of a study that is investigating the potential effects of mild disabilities on the performance of English as a foreign language middle school learner.

***The Questionnaire***

***I. Background Information:***

1) Please *circle* the highest level of school years completed

1 2 3 4 5 6                      7 8 9 10 11 12                      13 14 15 16 17 18  
 (Primary)                      (Middle/secondary)                      (University)

2) How long have you been practicing EFL teaching? .....year(s). **(Fill in the gap)**

3) Do you have experience teaching students with special needs (either physical or mental)?

Yes                       No  **(Check (X) only one)**

***II. Investigating the effects and existence of Mild disabilities:***

1) Are you familiar with the term Mild Disabilities? **(Check (X) only one)**

Yes                       No

2) Do some of your low achieving students tend to demonstrate the following behaviors?

**(Using the grid, Check (X) whatever behavior(s) demonstrated)**

Exagger- ated shyness, anxiety	Violence, provocative attitude	Disturbing Behavior in the class- room	Profane/foul language, rude, incon- siderate	Orders Defiance	Isolated form other peers	Restless- ness, ove- ractive, annoying, or noisy

3) Do these pervious behaviors last/occur frequently for more than six month time span?

Yes                       No  **(Check (X) only one)**

4) Are you familiar with your students' family and health history/conditions?    Yes     No

5) Do some of your less achieving students exhibit the following characteristics? (**Checklist (X) the following**)

- Slow understanding of the lesson       Low level of achievement in other learning modules
- Distractibility (easily lose attention to the course)       Excessive dependence on peers
- Poor social adaptive skills (organization, cleanness, tying shoelaces...)

6) Please determine if the following *language* deficits associate with some of your underachieving students: (**Checklist (X) the following**)

- Poor reading comprehension
- Lack of verbal participation in class
- Slow vocabulary growth
- Poor or illegible writing

7) Please determine if the following *memory* deficits associate with some of your underachieving students: (**Checklist (X) the following**)

- Trouble learning numbers, alphabet, or days of week
- Failure of automatic recall (i.e., remember previous knowledge without others help)
- Slow acquisition of new skills
- Poor spelling

8) Please determine if the following *attention* deficits associate with some of your underachieving students: (**Checklist (X) the following**)

- Impulsivity, careless errors
- Distaste for fine details, and inability to pay attention to them
- Inconsistency, distractibility

9) Please determine if the following *motor skills* malfunctions associate with some of your underachieving students: (**Checklist (X) the following**)

- Fist-like or tight pencil grip
- Illegible, slow or inconsistent writing
- Reluctance to write

10) Please determine if the following *other learning malfunctions* associate with some of your underachieving students: (**Checklist (X) the following**)

- Poor learning strategies

- Disorganization in time or space
- Peer rejection.

11) Have you been involved in official pedagogical seminars about students with mild (or moderate) intellectual disabilities, emotional disturbance (behavior disorder), or any other specific learning disabilities (e.g., Dyslexia-impairment in one's reading fluency and comprehension abilities)? **(Check (X) only one)**

YES  NO

12) If yes, what was that you have tackled?

.....  
.....

If *no*, suggest some plausible explanation for not have any (seminars)?

.....  
.....

13) Have you ever received an educational psychological aid, or being visited by a scholar counsel investigating cases of learning deficiency? **(Check (X) only one)**

YES  NO

14) The involvement of paraeducators (educators who are specialized in the educational psychology) can be of much help to teachers dealing with this sort of students. **(Check (X) one)**

Strongly agree  agree  neither agree nor disagree  disagree  wrongly disagree

***Thank you for your help!***