

OC.7-READING AND WRITING DIFFICULTIES: THE ROLE OF CONTEXT CHARACTERISTICS AND TEACHERS JUDGMENTS

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Background. In southern Italy and, specifically, in the region of Campania, many surveys show that the average of students with reading difficulties is much higher than in the northern Italy and abroad. On the other hand, specific learning disorders (SLDs) in Campania are much less certified. Aims. Since there are no etiological reasons that can explain this apparent inconsistency, an objective of this cross-sectional study was to evaluate the extent of reading/writing difficulties in students from a province of Campania and then to assess the ability of teachers to identify such difficulties in their students. Sample. Of a total of 241 enrolled students, 155 (64.31%), including 73 from primary school and 82 from secondary school, belonging to 5 schools in the province of Salerno (Italy), took part in the survey.

Methods. Students' reading and writing skills were assessed by means of standardized tests. The tests results were then compared with teachers judgments and context-related variables.

Results. At the reading test, 28.7% of primary school and 13.4% of lower secondary school students fell below the 5th percentile for age. Results of the writing test were even more significant: almost half of the students of both levels of education performed below the 5th percentile. Teacher judgments showed higher agreement with standardized assessments in primary (88%, K of Cohen = 0.68) than in secondary school (78%, K = 0.23).

Conclusion. Writing difficulties tend to persist to some extent in the sixth-grade classes and over, while reading skills improve with age. Further extended surveys are needed in this field.

