

Perceptual difficulties (auditory and visual) and the resulting academic difficulties in the learner

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Abstract:

Cognitive difficulties are considered primary developmental learning challenges, as they are closely related to other difficulties such as attention, memory, and thinking problems. These difficulties are associated with various brain functions and mental processes that students need throughout their educational stages. Any disruption to one or more of these processes inevitably leads to numerous academic challenges and is often the main cause of these difficulties. This is especially true due to the negative effects that hinder the learner's schooling and contribute to poor academic performance. Consequently, there is an increase in failure rates, sometimes leading to school dropout and ultimately resulting in a rise in educational wastage.

This research paper aims to explore cognitive difficulties, specifically auditory and visual perception difficulties, and their relationship with academic challenges such as reading and writing. It also examines the key factors that contribute to these difficulties and the methods that can be adopted to identify and diagnose them, in order to foster positive development in learners and provide them with a healthy educational environment.

Keywords: Perceptual difficulties; Academic challenges; Learning difficulties; Learner.

Introduction:

The topic of learning difficulties has become one of the most significant areas of interest for researchers and educators, as it is one of the most common problems in the school environment that affects the educational journey of students. Samuel Kirk defined learning difficulties as: "A disorder in one or more skills related to speech, perception, behavior, reading, spelling, writing, or arithmetic" (Al-Tuhami et al., 2018). He classified these difficulties into two types: "academic," which relates to difficulties in reading, writing, arithmetic, spelling, and written expression, and "developmental" difficulties, which include attention disorders, memory disorders, thinking disorders, and language and perception disorders.

Among the most widespread developmental difficulties faced by students in the school environment are "perceptual difficulties," as they are primary issues alongside attention and memory difficulties. These vary from one learner to another depending on the specific disorders they experience. Perception is considered a fundamental requirement in the learning process, as it is the process through which the learner recognizes various verbal and non-verbal information presented. Perceptual difficulties, such as auditory perception difficulties and visual perception difficulties, negatively affect the student's overall development, particularly in academic achievement, hindering their ability to grasp instructions. This, in turn, leads to difficulties in acquiring essential skills such as reading, writing, and arithmetic, especially since most academic subjects rely on hearing and vision. Studies have indicated that students with difficulties, particularly those suffering from perceptual disorders or cognitive functions, lack the ability to achieve closure, whether visual or auditory, making it hard for them to focus on form, as it appears complete (closed) to them (**Noura, p. 238**). This often leads students to exhibit various maladaptive behaviors such as anxiety, lack of motivation to learn, and low self-esteem, all of which impact their self-image and educational progress, particularly during the elementary phase. This stage is crucial in shaping a child's personality, determining their interests, attitudes, and desires, and what they learn in this phase reflects on subsequent educational stages. Thus, it is vital to focus on this phase of their education.

From this perspective, it is necessary to pay attention to students at risk by diagnosing and identifying their difficulties early on. This is supported by (**Farag Ibrahim and Rehab Youssef 2020**), who emphasize the need for early detection and intervention for students at risk of learning difficulties during early childhood, to ensure a brighter future. Additionally, the focus should be on identifying developmental learning difficulties, particularly during early childhood, and on developing strategies, methods, and tools for early detection (**Mohamed, 2020, p. 4**). Early detection of the difficulties a student faces helps us understand their strengths and weaknesses, making attention from their family and teachers an essential necessity.

From the above, the study's problem becomes evident and can be framed in the following questions:

- What are perceptual difficulties (auditory and visual)?
- What is meant by perceptual difficulties, specifically auditory and visual perception difficulties?
- What are the academic learning difficulties related to auditory and visual perception difficulties, and what are the main factors contributing to their emergence in learners?
- How can we diagnose academic learning difficulties?

Study Objectives:

The current study aims to:

- Identify auditory and visual perception difficulties.
- Discover the types of academic difficulties experienced by students that are related to auditory and visual perception difficulties.

- Explore the various studies that have examined the relationship between developmental and academic difficulties.
- Assist parents and teachers in understanding developmental difficulties, specifically auditory and visual perception difficulties, and the related academic difficulties addressed in this study.

Study Terms:

1. **Learning Difficulties:** Learning difficulties are disorders in one or more basic psychological processes involved in understanding and using spoken or written language. They manifest in issues with listening, thinking, speaking, reading, spelling, and arithmetic. These difficulties are not due to intellectual disabilities or sensory impairments (hearing or vision) or other disabilities (Abdul Hamid, 2009, p. 121). The term "learning difficulties" was first used by Samuel Kirk in 1963. His definition refers to delays, disorders, or deficits in one or more processes related to speech, language, reading, spelling, writing, or arithmetic, resulting from brain dysfunction, emotional disturbance, or behavioral problems (Al-Qamash, 2012, p. 76).

Kirk and Calfant classified learning difficulties into two main categories:

2. **Academic Learning Difficulties:** Academic learning difficulties refer to problems encountered by school children in core academic subjects. These include subtypes such as difficulties in reading, writing, arithmetic, and spelling.
3. **Developmental Learning Difficulties:** Developmental learning difficulties are related to brain functions and cognitive mental processes. These difficulties originate from functional disorders of the central nervous system and include primary developmental difficulties, such as those related to attention, perception, and memory, as well as secondary developmental difficulties, such as thinking, speech, and comprehension (Ali, 2013, pp. 32-33). Developmental difficulties often appear in children before school age and may persist if untreated. According to Kirk and Calfant, these difficulties stem from functional disorders in the central nervous system and can be divided into two categories:
 - **Primary Difficulties:** Such as attention, perception, and memory.
 - **Secondary Difficulties:** Such as recall, speech, comprehension, and verbal language (Al-Diyar, 2012, p. 22).

In this study, we chose to focus on two specific types of perceptual difficulties: auditory and visual perception difficulties. These are common among students and can hinder their academic progress, resulting in multiple issues, such as reading and writing difficulties, along with ways to diagnose them.

4. **Perceptual Difficulties:** Perception is the second cognitive mental process through which individuals interact with environmental stimuli, shaping them into a mental framework that conveys meaning and facilitates adaptation to their surrounding physical and social environment (Badeer, 2006, p. 138).

II. Perceptual Difficulties:

Students may face certain difficulties that make the process of perception challenging or inaccurate. Two of the most prominent forms of these difficulties are auditory perception difficulties and visual perception difficulties, which are detailed as follows:

1. **Auditory Perception Difficulties: (Fathi Younis 1984)** defined auditory perception as "the receptive aspect of verbal communication in language, which involves attention, listening, and focus on the various auditory stimuli received by the individual" (Ibrahim, 2010, p. 202). Auditory perception difficulties manifest in a student's inability to respond to or make sense of the information transmitted to the brain through hearing.

Even if the students' auditory organs are functioning normally, they may still struggle with recognizing the sounds of letters, words, and numbers and differentiating between them. This is referred to as a deficit in auditory perception. A child who suffers from auditory perception difficulties may encounter the following issues:

1.1 Difficulty in Speech Perception:

Speech perception refers to the ability to learn proper reading through recognizing that the words we hear are composed of sounds made when reading them. Children with learning difficulties often lack the ability to pronounce words correctly when reading them, leading to a loss of meaning and a struggle to understand them. This reduces their vocabulary, comprehension, and reading ability. Studies have shown that children can acquire these skills through specific teaching strategies that positively impact reading achievement in children with learning difficulties.

1.2 Difficulty in Auditory Discrimination:

Auditory discrimination is the ability to distinguish between spoken sounds and letters and to identify similar or different words. Children can be tested by providing them with words that sound alike but have different meanings, without using visual cues like watching the examiner's mouth. They may be asked to differentiate between words such as **(heart/dog)** or **(Picture/surah)**. Auditory discrimination is crucial for learning the phonetic structure of spoken language, and difficulty in distinguishing between similar-sounding letters, words, and syllables leads to challenges in understanding spoken language. This, in turn, results in difficulties in reading, expression, comprehension, conversation, and oral communication (**Melhem, 2002, pp. 230-231**).

1.3 Difficulty in Auditory Memory:

According to (**Mohamed 2020**), auditory memory is "the ability to store and retrieve auditory stimuli or information previously learned, such as recalling identical or different numbers or arranging the months of the Hijri and Gregorian calendars" (p. 9). Students with learning difficulties often struggle with reading comprehension, following verbal instructions, and engaging in basic conversations, necessitating the repeated explanation of lessons.

1.4 Difficulty in Auditory Sequencing:

Auditory sequencing refers to the ability to remember the order or sequence of items in a list of consecutive elements, such as alphabet letters, numbers, or the months of the year. Studies have shown that children with learning difficulties struggle to organize and sequence what they hear, making it difficult to learn arithmetic, reading, writing, spelling, and acquiring other skills.

1.5 **Difficulty in Auditory Association:**

This refers to the inability to complete sentences with coherent linguistic structure. Various forms of auditory perception difficulties exist, differing in type and degree of severity. Many researchers have agreed on the order of auditory perception difficulties based on their severity:

- Recognizing rhyme and alliteration in words.
- Recognizing individual letter sounds.
- Dividing sentences into words.
- Combining sounds to form words.
- Dividing words into syllables or individual sounds.
- Recognizing words when the position of sounds or letters is changed (**Ismail, p. 113**).

1.6 **Difficulty in Auditory Blending and Completion:**

This is the inability to blend one sound with others to form a word or sentence with meaning. Students with auditory blending difficulties struggle to complete spoken words when they only hear part of them. The skill of combining parts is important for auditory closure (**Al-Jazaeri, 2019, p. 10**).

2. **Visual Perception Difficulties:**

Visual perception has received significant attention, especially its difficulties, as it is responsible for interpreting visual inputs and processing information from the visual channel. The importance of visual perception stems from the importance of sight itself, which is one of the most crucial human senses, through which most of our knowledge is acquired (**Al-Bahiri, 2018, p. 9**).

Students with learning difficulties may experience varying degrees of visual perception problems. They may struggle to interpret what they see, have difficulty distinguishing objects and understanding relationships between them, and suffer from weak visual memory and concentration issues, preventing them from achieving coordination between vision and body movement. They also tend to be slow in learning the alphabet and face difficulties in copying (**Al-Juwald, 2012, pp. 132-133**).

Many students have difficulty distinguishing between objects and understanding their relationships consistently and predictably, leading to problems such as being unable to judge size or estimate the distance between objects (**Tawfiq, 2020, p. 7**). Researchers have sought to identify several problems related to visual perception difficulties, which students with learning difficulties may face, including:

2.1 **Difficulty in Visual Perception or Discrimination:**

Visual discrimination refers to the learner's ability to differentiate between one visible form and another, such as distinguishing between a picture and its background, or recognizing differences between a person with six fingers and others with a full set. It also includes recognizing similarities and differences in terms of length, width, color, shape, and space. In reading, this is assessed by the ability to differentiate between letters such as (N-C - B) or distinguish between numbers like (10 - 1) (Al-Bataineh et al., 2005, p. 108). According to Kirk and Calfant, children with learning difficulties struggle to distinguish visual stimuli or recognize differences in size, shape, distance, depth, letters, numbers, and more (Zuhair, 2014, p. 52).

2.2 Difficulty in Figure-Ground Discrimination:

Students with figure-ground discrimination issues cannot separate an object from its background, leading to confusion when more than one item appears on a page. They cannot focus on a question, shape, or any item independently of the visual background. As a result, they may be distracted by irrelevant stimuli, causing attention to drift and misperceptions to occur, resulting in poor focus on the necessary stimuli.

2.3 Difficulty in Visual Closure:

Visual closure is a perceptual skill that helps students understand incomplete images or words and treat them as whole. It reflects the ability to identify objects, shapes, symbols, or complete words and sentences, even when parts are missing (Abbas, p. 267).

2.4 Difficulty in Visual-Motor Coordination:

This involves coordination between the eyes and hand movements, evident in tasks like grasping and throwing objects or maintaining a steady line while writing.

2.5 Difficulty in Visual Processing Speed:

This refers to the time required for an individual to respond to visual stimuli. Students with slow visual perception need more time to process and analyze visual information, impacting their academic performance and social communication (Al-Bahiri, 2018, p. 50). This also includes appropriate responses to auditory or visual stimuli, where some children take longer to look at and name objects or follow verbal commands (Jadouh, 2013, p. 88).

In reviewing auditory and visual perception difficulties, several concepts explain the relationship between these perception difficulties and learning difficulties, particularly in reading and writing. Studies have shown that children with learning difficulties often suffer from perceptual deficits, which in turn impact their academic performance, especially in reading, writing, and arithmetic. For instance, a student with visual perception issues will struggle to read a sentence properly.

The concept of visual perception or discrimination is vital for learning reading, writing, arithmetic, and drawing, as it relates to the ability to perceive fine details, which can be identified through www.psychologyandeducation.net

various tests. Reading requires the child to perform processes of recognizing, analyzing, and synthesizing the visual structure of words. Thus, students with visual perception disorders have difficulty correctly recognizing words due to poor reception, organization, and understanding of visual stimuli within their visual field, even with normal vision (**Al-Bataineh et al., 2005, p. 108**).

Regarding visual perception difficulties, (**Melhem 2002, p. 296**) pointed out that most studies have shown that children with reading difficulties, in particular, and learning difficulties, in general, have problems with figure-ground discrimination, weak visual closure, shape constancy, spatial awareness, and spatial relationships.

Kirk and Calfant also noted that students who fail to remember the visual forms of letters and words may have trouble learning to write, as imagination and visualization are linked to writing deficits (**Magda, 2022, p. 7**). They emphasized that visual discrimination difficulties significantly affect a child's reading and writing abilities (**Zuhair, 2014**).

Studies by (**McLeod and Crump 1978**), (**Cunningham 1978**), and (**Harber 1979**) concluded that the learning difficulties experienced by some students are related to their perceptual organization abilities, particularly visual-motor perception. They found that it is possible to differentiate between students with learning difficulties and their peers based on certain perceptual functions. Meanwhile, the results of a study by (**Weaver and Rosner 1979**) indicated that a large number of children with learning difficulties have weaknesses in reading comprehension, which is linked to deficits in visual perceptual skills.

In a 1995 study conducted by Dos et al., the researchers explored the effects of cognitive therapy on improving certain perceptual and attentional difficulties and their impact on reading. They concluded that difficulties in learning to read were due to visual perception deficits in the study sample, specifically the inability to differentiate between visually similar symbols, such as (+), (×), and (-).

(**Kirk 1988**) argued that auditory discrimination is a fundamental requirement for learning the phonemic structure of spoken language. Failure to differentiate between similar letters, syllables, or words results in difficulty understanding spoken language and expressing oneself. Children with auditory discrimination problems often struggle with learning to read or spell using phonetic methods.

(**Fathi Abdel Rahim 1988**) pointed out that a disorder in auditory closure skills creates gaps that affect comprehension and optimal use of learned material. Deficits in this skill, especially at the ends of words, can lead to grammatical errors in writing or pronunciation (**Badeer, 2006, p. 141**).

According to (**Magda 2022**), who referenced several studies including one by Harrison, children with writing difficulties exhibit the following disorders:

1. Problems in visual perception (recognizing shapes and images), i.e., visual discrimination.
2. Problems in perceiving spatial relationships visually.

3. Disorders in visual-motor abilities, particularly the ability to process spatial relationships.
4. Disorders in visual-motor coordination, such as drawing and reproducing known or perceived objects.

A study by (Char et al. 1988) found that reading difficulties experienced by some children are due to disorders in both auditory and visual perception (Badeer, 2006, pp. 139-140).

From these studies, it can be concluded that developmental difficulties, such as visual and auditory perception issues, are the source of subsequent academic difficulties, particularly in reading and writing. Since identifying any problem requires proper and accurate diagnosis, it is crucial to diagnose students with developmental learning difficulties. Failure to do so inevitably leads to further academic difficulties, which will be explored in the following sections:

III- Academic Difficulties (Reading and Writing Difficulties) Resulting from Perceptual (Auditory and Visual) Difficulties:

1. **Reading Difficulties:** Reading difficulties are among the most prevalent issues faced by students with learning difficulties. Many common symptoms can be observed among these students, such as difficulty understanding what they read, reversing words or syllables when reading or writing, and academic achievement levels that are below those of their peers by one year or more, despite having similar intelligence levels (Khawafha & Abdulaziz, 2003, p. 128).

Several factors contribute to reading difficulties, which can be categorized into three main groups:

- **Physical Factors:** These include functional, organic, or physiological issues commonly found among children with learning difficulties in general and reading difficulties in particular. Research has indicated that reading difficulties can be attributed to genetic factors, with strong familial links between children and other family members who struggle with reading, especially among those with lower intelligence levels compared to their peers.
- **Environmental Factors:** Environmental factors play a significant role in reading difficulties, primarily due to a lack of effective training in reading skills, which should be provided through proper teaching methods. Additionally, some teachers' incorrect practices contribute to the development of reading difficulties in children.
- **Psychological Factors:** Psychological factors behind reading difficulties include:
 - **Auditory Perceptual Disorder:** Perception begins when an individual's senses, such as hearing or vision, are stimulated. During the reception process, the brain organizes and interprets these stimuli. Studies suggest that reading involves a continuous cycle of stimuli and responses, where each perceptual moment leads to sequential recognition and understanding of meaning. Reading is closely related to perceptual characteristics, including:
 - Distinguishing between figure and ground, and auditory and visual closure.
 - Generalization, learning, discrimination, perceptual integration.
 - Word recognition and distinguishing sounds within words.

- Auditory closure and the ability to blend or combine sounds.
- **Visual Perceptual Disorder:** Studies have shown that children with reading difficulties, in particular, and learning difficulties in general, struggle with distinguishing between figure and ground, weak visual closure, shape constancy, spatial awareness, and the perception of spatial relationships.
- **Language Disorders:** A child's vocabulary and language abilities directly impact their ability to learn, interpret, and comprehend printed or read material. Some children may understand spoken or heard language but struggle to use language for speaking, expressing themselves, and organizing their thoughts (Melhem, 2002, pp. 296-298).

Diagnosing Reading Difficulties: Diagnosis involves the procedures used to assess the nature of a student's difficulty and the potential causes. Proper diagnosis helps initiate an appropriate treatment program. There are two main types of diagnostic approaches used to identify reading difficulties:

- **Formal Diagnosis:** This method uses standardized tests with reference criteria to assess a child's reading ability and achievement level. Examples include:
 - **The Standardized Reading Diagnostic Test:** This measures specific reading skills verbally, including:
 - Auditory vocabulary: word meanings, word parts, auditory discrimination, and phonemic analysis.
 - Reading comprehension: word recognition, comprehension, reading rate, skimming, and summarizing.
 - **Doren's Diagnostic Reading Test:** This test measures word recognition skills.
 - **Wiederholt's Reading Comprehension Test (1986):** This test provides an overall measure of reading comprehension.
- **Informal Diagnosis:** This approach does not rely on standardized tests but involves assessing a child's reading level, errors, and performance using classroom materials, books, and worksheets. Teachers observe the student's reading responses, assess their reading level and proficiency, and monitor their reading speed and rate (Mahmoud et al., 2006, pp. 152-153).

2. Writing Difficulties:

Various definitions have attempted to conceptualize writing difficulties. (Mykelbust 1996) defined them as difficulties arising from a mild brain dysfunction, where the individual cannot remember the motor sequence for writing letters and words. Although the person knows the word they want to write and can pronounce and recognize it when seen, they cannot organize and execute the motor activities required to copy the word from memory (Zuhair, 2014, p. 44).

Mykelbust explains that a student with writing difficulties struggles to remember the motor sequence for writing letters and words. Even though they know the word they want to write and can pronounce and identify it, they are unable to produce and organize the motor activities necessary to write the

word from memory. Learning to write requires students to distinguish between the shapes of letters and numbers. Thus, children who cannot visually differentiate between them will inevitably face difficulties not only in writing but also in reading and mathematics (Lachheb & Ibrahim, 2017, p. 233).

Several factors contribute to writing difficulties, including:

- **Cognitive Factors:** These include visual deficiencies that manifest in several ways, such as visual perceptual difficulties, making it hard to differentiate between shapes, letters, and numbers. This leads to challenges in understanding directions and matching, significantly affecting the replication of letters and understanding spatial relationships. Students may have trouble distinguishing right from left, up from down, and suffer from poor visual memory, making it difficult for them to recall letters and words. Additionally, poor visual-motor coordination can lead to difficulties in acquiring writing skills (Al-Zahir, 2008, p. 244).
- **Psychological/Neurological Factors:** Writing difficulties may stem from mild brain dysfunction in the writing centers of the cerebral cortex, resulting in poor focus and problems organizing and executing the sequential motor system needed for copying letters and words.
- **Physical Factors:** These include motor coordination disorders and deficiencies in motor control, such as body posture issues, or problems controlling the head, arms, hands, and fingers. There may also be difficulties in fine motor control, affecting the ability to hold the pen properly.
- **Emotional Factors:** These include lack of motivation, perseverance in learning to write, anxiety, impulsivity, distractibility, and hyperactivity.
- **School-Related Factors:** Inadequate training in basic writing skills can contribute to difficulties, such as:
 - Proper sitting posture during writing and the correct way to hold a pen.
 - Developing the ability to distinguish between different letter shapes.
 - Enhancing the ability to estimate spacing between letters in words and between words in sentences, as well as to track the drawing of letters, numbers, and shapes.
 - Improving line organization, emphasizing the importance of writing on the line when first learning to write to avoid slanting (Ghanem, 2018, pp. 102-104).

When diagnosing writing difficulties in students, it is important to ensure:

- The child is at least six years old, as full physical and motor development is usually achieved by this age.
- The child does not suffer from cognitive impairments.
- The child does not have any neurological disorders affecting motor functions.

Teachers typically begin assessing writing difficulties when they observe that children are unable to write clearly or legibly compared to other children of the same age. Diagnosing and assessing writing difficulties requires a series of comprehensive evaluations, which extend beyond academic

performance to include medical, psychological, social, and educational assessments of the student with learning difficulties.

(Keller2001) states that diagnosing writing difficulties involves the following steps:

- **Medical Examination:** This includes assessing the child's general physical condition to ensure no illness or disability is present.
- **Psychological Examination:** Intelligence tests are conducted to determine the student's cognitive level.
- **Social Background Study:** This examines the child's family in terms of its social, economic, and cultural standing, as well as the family environment and how it supports the child's school performance.
- **Educational Study of the Student's Performance:** This involves:
 - Determining the student's dominant hand for writing.
 - Assessing writing errors by having the student perform tasks such as:
 - Copying short sentences to check for missing or miswritten letters.
 - Taking writing samples of letters and words, and writing sentences about a specific topic.
 - Evaluating writing skills, such as:
 - Body, hand, head, arm, and paper positioning during writing.
 - How the pen is held and the consistency of writing along the line.
 - Forming letters and sizes, maintaining spaces between letters, and observing margins.
 - Ensuring proper organization so that the meaning is clear.
 - Completing letters and words without leaving parts unfinished (Magda, 2022, pp. 8-9).

In reviewing various studies on the variables of this study, it became clear that the delay seen in many educational institutions in early detection of cognitive processing deficiencies contributes to widening the gap between students, particularly in academic, psychological, and social areas. This highlights the need for effective methods to detect learning difficulties early, as well as for creating and implementing training, therapeutic, and guidance programs tailored to each group, helping to reduce the severity of these difficulties, especially at an early age. Providing children with the appropriate academic support and care is crucial for them to cope with different challenges.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, perceptual difficulties hold a central place among developmental learning difficulties, particularly in relation to cognitive processing disorders. They play a significant role in causing students to experience one or more academic learning difficulties, especially in academic achievement. Perception is one of the most critical keys to effective learning, as successful learning requires an accurate perception of stimuli received by the learner.

Through our discussion of perceptual difficulties (auditory and visual) as developmental challenges, it becomes evident that these lead to academic difficulties, particularly in reading and writing. These

academic challenges are a direct consequence of auditory and visual perceptual problems. One of the studies that supports this is that of (**Wafaa Ben Burdi 2009**), which confirmed the strong relationship between developmental difficulties and academic challenges.

Finally, several recommendations should be considered:

- Attention should be given to the topic of perceptual difficulties, both auditory and visual, and their negative psychological and educational effects on students.
- It is crucial to diagnose and identify students with learning difficulties at an early age and provide appropriate treatment to achieve better outcomes.
- Teachers should be trained on how to deal with students facing reading and writing difficulties.
- Accurate diagnosis of students in their early school years is necessary.
- Teachers should engage in educational and physical activities that help develop the cognitive abilities of learners, including perception, by utilizing simple and easy-to-use auditory and visual educational tools.
- The learning environment should be adapted to meet the needs and requirements of these children.
- There must be therapeutic, training, and guidance programs to improve and develop children's skills and abilities.
- Greater emphasis should be placed on the professional and academic preparation of teachers to ensure they are equipped to address the needs of these students.
- More research should be conducted to explore the relationship between developmental difficulties and academic challenges.

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