Chapter 7
Family Dynamics and Socio–Demographic Characteristics of Children With Spelling Difficulties

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ABSTRACT

The present study aims to examine the correlation between students' performance on a family dynamics test and specific socio-demographic characteristics. The sample consisted of 225 children: 111 (49.3%) boys and 114 (50.7%) girls, with a mean age of 11.5 years. For data collection, the following were used: 1) A Self-administered Socio-demographic Questionnaire, 2) The Zachos Dictation Writing Test (DWT) and 3) The Family Dynamics Measure II Questionnaire (FDM II). The findings of the study indicated that most of the children produced a high number of spelling errors. They were found to have high scores on five of the six family dynamics dimensions, except for one. Statistical differences were found in four family dynamics dimensions in relation to demographic characteristics: Children's and parents' satisfaction with school performance, perceived difficulties in spelling, essay writing, arithmetic, oral and written tests, and leisure time utilization.

INTRODUCTION

Spelling is a basic academic skill that is essential for future successful participation in modern societies (Zarić et al., 2021). The ability to spell is a gradually developing, time-consuming, and complex process (Diamanti et al., 2014). The literature reports that many children experience great difficulty in learning

to spell. These children usually also have difficulties in learning to read as well. The family of these children plays a vital role in their efforts to master reading and writing (Treiman, 2017).

The family literacy environment is now an established predictor of children's language and literacy development (Hamilton et al., 2016; Shahaeian et al., 2018). The learning environment provided by parents at home has been well researched as a dimension and refers to the quality of language stimuli and behaviors that contribute to literacy development. For the development of children's language abilities, psycholinguists have long documented the influence of the family, in particular the mother (Gallaway & Richards, 1994). However, investigations of family variables likely to be associated with difficulties in spelling have mostly focused on environmental, genetic, and socioeconomic factors, and findings do not seem to respond well to the questions that have been raised over time (Puglisi et al., 2017).

In addition, no studies, both in Greek and international literature, can be identified that examine the association between spelling errors and family dynamics. Family dynamics refers to the patterns of interactions between family members, their relationships and roles, and the factors that shape these interactions. Interpersonal interactions between family members have an effect that is not temporary, it is long-lasting. Stable and supportive family relationships provide love, support, and care, whereas insecure and stressful family relationships bring about negative criticism, strain, and conflict. By implication, family dynamics and the quality of family relationships can have either a positive or negative impact on an individual's health, well-being, and overall development (Jabbari & Rouster, 2023). The family dynamics included by Barnhill (1979) in the "family health cycle" are defined as "the unique ways" in which family members relate.

Research on the family dynamics of children with difficulties in spelling is limited. Researchers point out that students' family dynamics are related to their performance in orthography. Besides, it has been shown that family cohesion, which constitutes one of the positive dimensions of family functioning, predicts positive or negative academic achievement, including spelling (Feldman et al., 2018).

The interaction between parents and children is an important interpersonal aspect of children's performance and school learning. Parental involvement influences children's success in school, with typical examples being, talking with the child about school, supervising homework, meeting with the teacher(s), or visiting the child's classroom. These behaviors have been shown to predict positive outcomes for children, including academic skills (Pomerantz et al., 2007). In addition, mothers and fathers have different roles in parenting, and these roles vary across countries (Newman et al., 2015).

The Present Study

The existing literature on learning environment conditions confirms the importance of adequate family functioning and the existence of a satisfactory family context for children's effective academic and literacy development (Briley et al., 2019; Erbeli et al., 2019; Kong et al., 2018). However, no studies have focused on the association between spelling errors and family dynamics, particularly the association between socio-demographic characteristics of children with difficulties in spelling and family dynamics.

The present study aims to examine the correlation between children's performance on a family dynamics test and specific socio-demographic characteristics, such as gender, father's and mother's occupation, help with homework, the degree of satisfaction with their school performance, their parents' degree of satisfaction with their school performance, difficulties they face in school subjects (reading, writing, arithmetic), essays, tests (oral and written), and use of leisure time. The hypotheses of the study were the following:

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