



## Learning Disability the Neglected Classroom Reality

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### ABSTRACT

This paper may not enable the teacher to formulate diagnostic tests or remedial strategies but she should be in a position to cooperate and collaborate with the counselor and the clinical psychologist and faithfully carry out their instructions to the benefit of her disabled students. The writer intends to urgently call on the teacher educators to understand and address the needs of these children. This can be achieved by creating awareness among the teachers and by training them at both pre-service and in-service levels.

### KEYWORDS

Class Rooms, Students, Learning Disability.

### Introduction:

Children with Learning Disability are misunderstood, neglected, and even ignored in our school system. This is partly because teachers lack the skills to handle these children and partly because by the time the nature of these children's problem diagnosed, it may be too late! These difficult can be correct by using structured remedial principles in a programme that understands the children's needs.

How often we have heard these complaints...

"My pupil finds it difficult to compute!

This boy makes too many spelling mistakes

This girl cannot even copy from the blackboard

Parents and Teachers know what is wrong

They, however, do not know what causes it.

### Background of Learning Disability (LD):

Since early 1960's, parents in the United States became aware of their children's inability to cope with the everyday classroom learning. Since these children did not fall into 'special need category' they could not receive those benefits. Within a few years, the government recognized the problem and passed effective laws to help these children receive the attention they needed and deserved. Today, the Western countries have highly developed methods to help their Learning Disabled children to enjoy an almost normal student life.

The Indian scenario, unfortunately, is almost dismal. Except for a few scattered efforts by schools, communities, governments, and other agencies, this reality has been ignored. Children suffer, parents suffer and the future of India suffers.

### Rationale for this Paper:

Information about the incidence of Learning Disability is scanty. Spot surveys made in primary schools by a few organizations indicate an appreciable degree (2-18%) of prevalence of LD. Awareness about LD as a factor in under-achievement has led Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) and Indian Certificate of Secondary Education (ICSE) Board to announce concessions for recognized disabled students. State Governments to Maharashtra, Tamilnadu and Karnataka have made it compulsory for schools to provide facilities to ease the problem. As a result, substantial improvement in the students'

performance at Secondary School Certificate (SSC) and Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) examinations (22% and 65% reported in one or two cases).

However, benefit of such provisions is not yet available to many LD children in India. Government of Uttar Pradesh has not yet made it mandatory to provide special facilities to children with LD. Such children in Uttar Pradesh medium schools suffer the most, as standardized diagnostic test in Uttar Pradesh are not available. These schools also lack facilities like recourse room or remedial classes and trained teachers to teach students with Learning Disability.

Pre-service and in-service teacher-training programmes in Uttar Pradesh have not given due importance to develop awareness about LD and its remediation techniques and related training. This writer, therefore, proposes that an elective paper/course at B.Ed. and/or M.Ed. levels be introduced in order to train teachers. It is hoped that the teacher who opts for this elective paper on Learning Disability would become fully aware of and particularly sensitive to her students' problems. She should become sufficiently skilled in handling material used in helping students overcome their disability.

### About Learning Disability:

#### Possible LD Indicators:

- Difficulty in learning new skills, relying on memorization
- Trouble learning about time
- Difficulty remembering facts
- Poor coordination, 'accident prone', unaware of physical surroundings
- Having a hard time learning the connection between letters and sounds (Phonetics)
- Spelling and reading errors such as substitutions (house/home), letter reversals (b/d), inversions (m/w) and transpositions (felt/left)
- Problems with planning
- Impulsive behavior
- Transposes number sequences and confusing arithmetic signs

### What is Learning Disability?

Learning disability is a life-long disorder that affects the manner in which individuals with average or above average intelligence select, retain, and express information. It reflects a difficulty in encoding and decoding information as it travels between the senses and the brain. Learning disabilities are also termed as 'learning differences,' based on the fact that

certain individuals learn differently they aren't unable to learn, but respond best to ways of learning that are different from traditional teaching methods. "Such children feel caged because they are intellectually normal but cannot figure out what is happening in the class. There is a gap between their potential and their performance," Says Marita Adam, a special education teacher who coordinates Sangath's programme for mentally challenged children.

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Learning disabilities vary in the level of severity and invariably interfere with the acquisition or use of one or more of the following important skills:

Oral language	Listening
Speaking	Understanding
Reading	Decoding
Comprehension	Written language
Spelling	Written expression
Mathematics	Computation
Problem solving	

### Types of Learning Disabilities:

Learning disabilities fall into these major categories:

#### 1. Developmental : speech and language disorders

- Articulation Disorder (difficulty in producing speech sounds)
- Expressive Language Disorder (difficulty in communicating verbally)
- Receptive Language Disorder (difficulty with listening comprehension)

#### 2. Academic skills disorders:

- Dyslexia : reading ability disorder (difficulty in understanding the written word)
- Dysgraphia : writing ability disorder (difficulty in forming written letters)
- Dyscalculia : computing ability disorder (difficulty in understanding Math) Apart from these, there are certain disorders that affect the ability to learn but do not meet the criteria for a specific learning disability:

**3. Motor Skills Disorders and Specific Developmental Disorders** delay in acquiring language, academic and motor skills. Poor hand-eye coordination causes poor handwriting as well as certain spelling and memory disorders.

#### 4. Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

caused by a biochemical problem, where the structure and/or function of the brain has been affected by some of trauma. The learning process is therefore hindered as a result of inattention, impulsiveness, or hyper activity level of the learner.

### Causes of Learning Disabilities:

Learning disabilities are caused by abnormal brain structure and function. Different abnormalities cause different types of learning disabilities. These neurological abnormalities can re-

sult from a variety of sources:

#### Genetics:

Abnormal brain structure and function can be inherited factors during pregnancy that impact brain development drugs, alcohol, smoking, German measles, poor nutrition, or maternal stress.

#### Factors during birth:

Premature delivery, low birth weight, or oxygen deprivation

#### Factors in early childhood:

Neonatal seizures developmental or relation trauma, parental stress, poor nutrition, inadequate learning environment, or toxins such as cadmium, lead, or chemotherapy brain trauma or tumors.

#### Effects of Learning Disabilities:

Learning disabilities can affect individuals and others around them in many Different Ways throughout Lie:

Students with learning disabilities often have to deal with failure, misunderstanding from teachers, humiliation in the classroom and ridicule from other students, resulting in low self-esteem.

Parents of such children often stressed, and siblings may grow resentful or jealous of attention given to the LD child.

In the workplace, the disabled individual may experience misunderstanding, ridicule, and self-esteem problems, while supervisors and peers may also suffer from stress and resentment in dealing with the person's learning disabilities.

#### Treatment of Learning Disabilities:

A wide variety of programmes has developed to help children with learning disabilities. The following are the steps suggested for the assessment and treatment by Tata Interactive System (Jan 2006)

#### Pre-assessment:

This step tests the children enrolling into various grades in a school. This helps separate the regular performers from the children who have special needs. At this point, the attempt is not to decipher the nature and the extent of the special needs but just to identify the children lagging behind.

This test can be made fully online with questions drafted in such a manner that facilitates identification. Subject matter experts (SMEs) should formalize the questions keeping in mind the grades to which the children belong and the corresponding state standards.

#### Screening:

Here, the children who identified as lagging behind through the pre-assessment need to undertake a series of Screening Tests. They aim to analyze the type and extent of every child's learning disability, based on a combination of online and offline tasks.

The online component of the screening comprises of objective questions such as math, identifying objects, or listening to conversations, and answering questions based on the same.

This process also includes an element of subjective evaluation on the part of the special educator who would administer the test. There are also a series of physical tasks (administered offline) such as placing blocks in slots, which the child is expected to accomplish.

#### How to diagnose LD?:

Proper diagnosis of LD involves a multidisciplinary approach by a team of specialists, viz., the Pediatric Neurologist, Counselor, Clinical Psychologist, Special Educator and Child Psychiatrist.

Firstly, audiometric and ophthalmic examinations are done to

rule out hearing and visual deficits, as they are common causes of poor school performance.

A pediatric neurologist takes a details clinical history and does a thorough physical examination to exclude medical causes.

A counselor rules out whether any environmental deprivation due to poor home or school environment, or any emotional problem due to stress at home or at school, is primarily responsible for the child's poor school performance.

A clinical psychologist conducts the standard intelligence test. This helps to exclude borderline intellectual functioning and mild mental retardation conditions, which cause poor school performance.

A special educator assesses the child's academic achievement by administering standard educational tests.

A child psychiatrist plays an important role in confirming the diagnosis by other team members.

### Post Assessment:

According to the research, a child with special needs can be assessed for improvement only after two years of teaching. The children require this period to understand after retain the nuances of the subject matter that they have been taught. Hence, the post-assessment is held two years after the individualized educational programme is prescribed. This is an online test replete with questions drafted with inputs from the Subject Matter Experts. It also observed that children with special needs mostly do not completely recover from their learning problems. As a result, the requirement of constant tracking becomes imperative. The performances of all the children with special needs are therefore tracked vis-a-vis that of an average learner to decide whether they need to be given special attention.

### Outcome of the Intervention Programme for LD:

The outcome in a child with Learning Disability depends on the severity of the disability, stage at which remedial education has started the length and continuity of treatment, presence or absence of associated emotional problems, and parental and school supports. With appropriate remedial education and provisions, most children with Learning Disability can be expected to achieve academic competence and complete their education in a regular mainstream school. However, some children are still unable to cope up and need to transfer to/continue their education in special schools.

### Intervention Techniques:

#### 1. Resource Room:

A room set up in a school to provide assistance to LD or exceptional children. The regular class teacher is considered the best person to identify children who cannot cope. Class teacher's coordination with the trained resource room teacher is important to ensure that the resource room does not become a 'dumping ground' for children who should remain in the regular class. First-generation learners, with no previous exposure to education in their homes, or children with emotional problems who are, therefore, slow in keeping up with the rest of the class, should not be mistaken for children with the course cannot be expected to pay attention to those who are weak. The resource room, which has a flexible curriculum and evaluation system, should help these children and facilitate their getting back into the mainstream.

#### 2. Inclusion/Mainstreaming:

Inclusion or mainstreaming (partial inclusion) essentially is the process by virtue of which students with special learning needs are included in regular classes. Students with learning disabilities feel better about themselves when they are included in classes with their peers who don't have learning disabilities. Such inclusion would help the LD children develop social skills, social acceptance, and greater self-esteem.

### 3. Special Schools:

A special school is a school catering to students who have special educational needs, e.g. because of learning difficulties or physical disabilities. Special schools are specifically designed, staffed and resourced to provide the appropriate special education for children with special needs. In short, Special School provide individualized education, addressing specific needs.

### Teacher-Training:

Result of research and opinion of experts are unanimous that, in most cases, learners with special needs are highly disadvantaged due to their teachers' inability to recognize their unique problems, which are often identified too late to be rectified.

In-service training courses should be used to create awareness amongst existing teachers of the unique learning disabilities with children. The teachers should also be taught classroom management techniques and remedial exercises that equip them to look after the children more effectively.

Here are some suggestions that are easy to incorporate into classroom routine. Naturally, different strategies will be of more or less value to different students, particularly with a culturally and linguistically diverse class.

Always ask questions in a clarifying manner and then have the students with learning disabilities describe his or her understanding of the questions.

- Give the extra gift of time whenever possible. Students with learning disabilities may require extra time to complete in-class and homework assignments as well as tests.
- Eliminate classroom distractions such as, excessive noise, flickering lights, etc.
- Give assignments both orally and in writing.
- Have extra and easier practice exercises available for lessons, in case the student has problems.
- Provide and teach memory associations (mnemonics strategies).
- Technical content should be presented in small incremental steps.
- Use plenty of examples, oral or otherwise, in order to make topics more applied especially in concept attainment.
- Use straight forward instructions with step-by-step unambiguous terms; preferably, presented one at a time.
- Explicitly state the topic at hand and proceed in a structured, concrete manner, progress from the obvious to the concrete to the abstract, do not jump, without warning, from one topic to another.
- Write legibly, use large type; do not clutter and blackboard with non-current/non-relevant information.

### Conclusion:

Most children with special needs will require lifelong support services, even when admitted in mainstream schools. Though admissions to mainstream school are mandatory by law, most schools deal with inclusion as a formality and do not provide appropriate services. A few progressive schools where such children are admitted may be too expensive for an ordinary family.

It is, therefore, necessary that an average, inexpensive school should be in a position to help students with LD. They can do so if they have all teachers who are sensitive to problems of learning-disabled and at least one teacher who is well-trained to identify disabilities and arrange for referrals. This teacher should be able to follow up on the recommendations provided by the experts with the help of his/her colleagues. That teacher should use remedial techniques in the resource room of the school.

State agencies, local agencies, area schools and parents all need to come together to address this neglected reality and work together to improve the Children's and eventually, India's future. Help from NGO's should be sought. Successful

programme models from other States and countries should be followed, understood and adopted for our local needs.

As an educator, the writer wishes to propose a course at B.Ed. degree programme that she feels will equip the teacher to recognize, deal with and gently usher the children with this 'hidden handicap' into the world outside the home and classroom.

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