



ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

Education

LEARNING DISABILITY: DEFINING AND UNDERSTANDING

KEY WORDS:

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ABSTRACT

Learning disabilities can be assumed as problems one encounter while learning, which often can be seen someone facing problem in “listening, thinking, speaking, reading, writing or doing mathematical calculations” due to problem in psychological process involved in the understanding but not due to primarily having “visual, hearing impairment, motor handicap, mental retardation, environmental or economic disadvantages as root cause”. These problems are considered as internal and as the result of the malfunction of the nervous system, which may happen at any given point of life time. However, it is crucial to not confuse the learning disabilities with the other disabilities i.e., mental retardation, poor reading, hyperactivity, or emotional problems. A person with a learning disability has a set of unique features that must be considered in order for educational interventions to take place.

INTRODUCTION

“Specific learning disability” (SLD) was included in “The Rights of Persons with Disability Act-2016”. “The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act” (2016) refers to it as “a heterogeneous group of conditions wherein there is a deficit in processing language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself as a difficulty to comprehend, speak, read, write, spell, or mathematical calculations. The term includes such conditions as perceptual disabilities, dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia, dyspraxia and developmental aphasia”. Occurrence of specific learning disability in India ranges from 5%–15% in various studies (Singh et al., 2017) and boys are more affected than girls (Johnson, 2017).

Definitions of learning disability

Kirk (1962) defines, “Learning disability refers to retardation, disorder, or delayed development in one or more of the processes of speech, language, reading, spelling, writing or arithmetic resulting from possible cerebral dysfunction and/ or emotional or behavioral disturbances and not from mental retardation, sensory deprivation, cultural or instructional factors”.

Kavale and Forness (1966) define, “People with learning disabilities belong to a group of very diverse individuals but they do share one common problem. They do not learn in the same way or as efficiently as their nondisabled peers. Although most possess normal intelligence, their academic performance is significantly behind their classmates. Some have great difficulty learning mathematics, but most find the mastery of reading and writing to be their most difficult challenge”.

The Association for Children with Learning Disability (USA, 1967)- “A child with learning disability is one with adequate mental ability, sensory processes and emotional stability who has a limited number of a specific deficit in perceptual, integrative or expressive processes which severely impair learning efficiency. This includes children who have central nervous system dysfunctions which are expressed primarily in impaired learning efficiency” (Telford & Sawrey, 1977).

“National Advisory Committee on handicapped children” (USA, 1969), adopted the below mentioned definition: “Specific learning disabilities’ means a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, and spell or to do mathematical calculations. The term includes such conditions as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. The term does not apply to children who have learning problems that are primarily the

result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities, of mental retardation, of emotional disturbances, or of environmental disadvantages” (Federal Register, 1977).

The terminology –“learning disability” means the conditions previously known as brain damage, brain dysfunction, sensory aphasia (rules of the ability to understand spoken words, symbols, touch or print) clear aphasia (loss of speech ability), alexia or word blindness (loss of reading ability – low level of alexia is called dyslexia) acalculia (loss of arithmetic ability- at low level is called dyscalculia) - agraphia (inability to learn to write - low level agraphia is called -dysgraphia).

Nature and characteristics of learning disability

Educational and psychological researches have paid attention to a number of important behavioural and characteristic traits, also overall personality and characters of children with learning disabilities.

1. Learning disabilities usually correspond to substantial problems in development and usage of language, reasoning and mathematical abilities, or skills pertaining to society.
2. They may be subjected to hyperactivity and impulsivity.
3. Mostly, these students have difficulties in learning consequently may have behavioural problems i.e., anxiousness, depression, restlessness.
4. Overtly nothing can be associated with learning disabilities. Their physical appearance may be as fit as a general student could have.
5. Most of them always show substantial educational gaps as their learning potential may differ from their academic achievement scores.
6. Some of them may have suspicious neurological signs and EEG abnormalities.
7. Their “Memory, thinking, attention, general coordination, perception and motor skills” may be impaired.
8. A major problem in all these children is the observed delay in learning and performing educational tasks. As with physical or mental impairments in physical and mental activity, there are limitations in learning and acquisition.
9. They exhibit the following learning characteristics that commonly contribute to learning disabilities. (a) lack of motivation, (b) carelessness, (c) inability to generalize, (d) solving various problems, processing of information, and skills for thinking etc.
10. The students' learning disabilities are so intense that they need special attention, care, and correctional programs to correct learning problems and disabilities.

Causes of learning disabilities-

Generally the factors causing learning disabilities may be found to fall in the following three categories-

1 Heredity or genetic factors-

In other cases, the genetic or heredity component is determined to be the primary cause of learning difficulties in children. The following findings support the hypothesis that there is a link between inheritance and disabilities:

- (a) At least one hyperactive or impulsive parent has been discovered in almost 20% to 25% of overactive or impassioned children.
- (b) Emotional imbalances, memory and cognitive impairments, as well as speech and learning disorders, have been reported to be hereditary.
- (c) By further considering genetic studies, scientists and psychologists in the United States have succeeded in discovering specific genes that may be potential in creating reading and learning problems.

2. Organic or physiological factors

Factors such as below-the-knee pain, no matter how minor, create this dysfunction.

- (a) Damage to the brain caused by an accident or a lack of oxygen before, during, or after birth, resulting in neurological problems that may impede their capacity to learn.
- (b) Injury to the spinal cord, message-carrying nerves, and other structures, resulting in their dysfunction and subsequent learning difficulties.
- (c) Biochemical imbalances induced by variables such as the below-mentioned conditions might cause central nervous system dysfunction.
- (d) Colorings and flavourings in many of the foods ingested by children have been linked to hyperactivity, impulsivity, emotional instability, and central nervous system malfunction.

In conclusion, one's learning abilities and capacities are highly reliant on the appropriate functioning of one's nervous system. Any indices which may do neurological damage to the central nervous system can thus affect and could be a reason for major learning issues.

3. Environmental variables-

In many circumstances, inappropriate and unfavorable circumstances and aspects in a person's physical, social, cultural, and educational environment can create learning impairments. Some of these elements may be considered under-researched.

- 1. The fetus's low nutrition and unsuitable environment for development in the mother's womb.
- 2. Premature birth, an unpleasant and unsuitable environment at the moment of birth, or central nervous system impairment.
- 3. Early-life nutritional deficiencies, chronic diseases, accidental shock, and wounds that can result in nervous dysfunction.
- 4. Children with lesser or no medical attention always suffer from loss of senses like auditory, visual, tactile, and olfactory or other neural disabilities are learning impaired.
- 5. Inadequate premature experiences and external cues for the purpose of learning and equation as a result of a flawed educational setup.
- 6. Inadequate or incorrect instructions acquired as a result of their own family situation or teachers' motivation, expertise, and ability.
- 7. Emotional distress and a lack of motivation as a result of a variety of variables in a person's surroundings, as well as malfunctioning physiological processes.
- 8. Inadequate and inappropriate language development, as well as a reduced concentration and attention capacity.
- 9. The misuse of narcotics and alcoholic materials, such as alcohol usage.
- 10. Emission and being in the presence of faulty models of learning in a person's ethnographic, demographic and academic environment.

- 11. Deprivation on a social and cultural level.

Learning Disabilities Types

The seven diseases are classified as unique learning disabilities by the Learning Disabilities Association of America and many other mental health professionals.

1.Dyslexia

It is a learning disability that affects reading, writing, and understanding. Dyslexics may have trouble decoding words or with phonemic awareness, which is the ability to recognize particular sounds within words.

2.Dysgraphia

Dysgraphia is a condition in which people have difficulty putting their thoughts into writing or drawing. Dysgraphia is characterized by poor handwriting; however, it is not the only symptom. Sufferers have difficulty expressing themselves in writing, whether it's through spelling, grammar, vocabulary, critical thinking, or memory.

3.Dyscalculia

This learning disability mainly affects mathematical calculations. Dyscalculia affects people's ability to understand arithmetic ideas, numbers, and reasoning. Individuals with "math dyslexia" may have trouble in understanding time from clock, money counting, finding patterns, recalling arithmetic information, and completing mental math problems. The severity of math learning disabilities vary a lot depending on the child's other abilities and weaknesses.

4. Auditory processing disorder

Patients with auditory processing disorder (APD) have trouble processing sounds. Individuals with APD may be unable to filter various sounds, such as a teacher's speech against background noise, or may misunderstand the order of sounds.

5. Nonverbal learning disabilities

While it may seem that nonverbal learning disabilities (NVLD) refer to a person's incapacity to communicate, it essentially denotes problems understanding nonverbal behaviors or social cues. NVLD patients have trouble understanding nonverbal communication, such as body language, facial expressions, and voice tone.

6. Language processing disorder

A subgroup of auditory processing disorder, language processing disorders arise when a person has specific challenges processing spoken language, affecting both receptive and expressive language.

7. Visual motor and perceptual deficits

Persons having this type of disability have poor hand-eye coordination, unable to follow the reading text position, have problems in handling pencils etc. related to other fine motor skills. They often commit errors while working on a project or writing by mistakenly using similar looking letters interchangeably.

Other conditions that make learning difficult

School difficulties aren't always the result of a learning disability. Learning becomes more difficult as a result of anxiety, sadness, stressful situations, emotional trauma, and other disorders that impair concentration. Furthermore, ADHD and autism are sometimes confused with learning difficulties or co-occur.

CONCLUSION

Each person may have different types of learning disabilities. Researchers speculate that learning disabilities are instigated by the way the human brain processes and processes the information. Children with learning disabilities

cannot be doomed as “dumb” or “lazy”. In fact, often they do have moderate to excessive intelligence, but their processing of information is different. These disabilities are thought to be not curable. However, these children can also do wonders and can overcome any hurdle, if provided with the right type of help.

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