

Learning Disability and Special EducationThink ...Reflect.....Act!!!**Mrs. Priyadarshini A. Sardesai**

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INTRODUCTION:

Imagine having the essential needs and ideas to communicate, but being unable to express them perhaps, feeling bombarded by sights and sounds, unable to focus attention or trying to read or add but not being able to make sense of the letters or numbers. You May be the parent or the teacher of a child experiencing academic problems, or have someone in your family diagnosed as being 'Learning Disabled'. Possibly you were told that your child had a reading problem called dyslexia or some other learning disability.

Although from person to person different, these difficulties make up the common daily experiences of many learning disabled children, adolescents, and adults. A Person with a learning disability may experience a cycle of academic failure and a lowered self-esteem. Having these handicaps or living with someone who has them can bring overwhelming frustration. Unlike other disabilities, such as paralysis or blindness, a Learning Disability (LD) is a hidden handicap. A Learning disability doesn't disgorge or leave visible signs that would invite others to be understanding or offer support. And above all teaching the children with Learning Disabilities is not an easy job.

Attempt of the Study is to find out difficulties faced by parents and the teachers of children with learning disabilities and offer some measures to prevent or overcome them.

The skills most often affected are:

Reading, Writing, Listening, Speaking, Reasoning and doing Math are the most affected.

Learning disabilities (LD) vary from person to person. One person with learning disabilities May not have the same kind of learning problems as another person with learning disabilities. One person may have trouble with reading and writing. Another person with learning disabilities may have problems with understanding math or another may have trouble in each of these areas, as well as with understanding what people are saying.

Researchers think that learning disabilities are caused by differences in how a person's brain works and how it processes information. Children with learning disabilities are not "dumb" or "lazy." In fact, they usually have average or above average intelligence. Their brains just process information differently.

There is no "cure" for learning disabilities. They are life-long. However, children with learning disabilities can be high achievers and can be taught ways to get around the learning disability. With the right help, children with learning disabilities can and do learn successfully.

". . . 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, spell or do mathematical calculations, including conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental dysgraphia."

MEANING AND DEFINITION:

LD is a disorder that affects child's ability to either interpret what they see and hear or to link information from different parts of the brain. These limitations can show up in many ways as specific difficulties with spoken and written language, coordination, self-control or attention. Such difficulties extend to schoolwork and can hamper learning to read or write, or to do math. Learning disabilities can be lifelong conditions that, in some cases, affect many parts of a person's life: school or work, daily routines, family life, and sometimes even friendships and play. In some people, many overlapping learning disabilities may be apparent. Other people may have a single, isolated learning problem that has little impact on other areas of their lives.

Learning disability is a general term that describes the specific kinds of learning problems. A learning disability can cause a person to have trouble in learning and using certain skills.

By law, learning disability is defined as a significant gap between a person's intelligence and the skills the person has achieved at each age.

DEFINITIONS:

Learning disability: A learning disability (LD) is a disability that affects an individual of average to above average intelligence processed information (receives it, integrates it, and/or expresses it). The student with a learning disability may have language based and/or perceptual problems that affect reading, spelling, written, language, or mathematics. For some, organization, time management, and social interpersonal skills also are affected.

The predominant legal definition, which is set forth in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), provides: The term, "children with specific learning disabilities," is defined as those children who have a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which the disorder may manifest itself in imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell or do mathematical calculations. The disorder may include a perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia.

SIGNIFICANCE OF LEARNING DISABILITY:

When a child has a Learning disability, he or she:

- May have trouble learning the alphabet, rhyming word or connecting letters to their sounds;
- May make many mistakes when reading aloud and repeat and pause often;
- May not understand what he or she reads;
- May have real trouble with spelling;
- May have very messy handwriting or hold a pencil awkwardly;
- May struggle to express ideas in writing;
- May learn language late and have a limited vocabulary;
- May have trouble remembering the sounds that letters make or hearing slight differences between words;
- May have trouble understanding jokes, comic strips, and sarcasm;
- May have trouble following directions;
- May mispronounce words or use a wrong word that sounds similar;
- May have trouble organizing what he or she wants to say or not be able to think of the word he or she needs for writing or conversation;
- May not follow the social rules of conversation, such as taking turns, and May stand too close to the listener;
- May confuse math symbols and misread numbers;

- May not be able to retell a story in order (what happened first, second, third); or
- May not know where to begin a task or how to go on from there.

Learning disabilities, or learning disorders, are an umbrella term for a wide variety of learning problems. A learning disability is not a problem with intelligence or motivation. Kids with learning disabilities aren't lazy or dumb. In fact, most are just as smart as everyone else. Their brains are simply wired differently. This difference affects how they receive and process information.

Simply put, children and adults with learning disabilities see, hear, and understand things differently. This can lead to trouble with learning new information and skills, and putting them to use. The most common types of learning disabilities involve problems with reading, writing, math, reasoning, listening, and speaking.

Learning disabilities look very different from one child to another. One child may struggle with reading and spelling, while another loves books but can't understand math. Still another child may have difficulty understanding what others are saying or communicating out loud. The problems are very different, but they are all learning disorders.

It's not always easy to identify learning disabilities. Because of the wide variations, there is no single symptom or profile that you can look to as proof of a problem. However, some warning signs are more common than others at different ages. If you're aware of what they are, you'll be able to catch a learning disorder early and quickly take steps to get your child help.

The following checklist lists some common red flags for learning disorders. Remember that children who don't have learning disabilities may still experience some of these difficulties at various times. The time for concern is when there is a consistent unevenness in your child's ability to master certain skills.

▪ COMMON TYPES OF LEARNING DISABILITIES

Dyslexia	Difficulty reading	Problems reading, writing, spelling, speaking
Dyscalculia	Difficulty with math	Problems doing math problems, understanding time, using money
Dysgraphia	Difficulty with writing	Problems with handwriting, spelling, organizing ideas
Dyspraxia (Sensory Integration Disorder)	Difficulty with fine motor skills	Problems with hand-eye coordination, balance, manual dexterity
Dysphasia/Aphasia	Difficulty with language	Problems understanding spoken language, poor reading comprehension
Auditory Processing Disorder	Difficulty hearing differences between sounds	Problems with reading, comprehension, language
Visual Processing Disorder	Difficulty interpreting visual information	Problems with reading, math, maps, charts, symbols, pictures

Other disorders that make learning difficult

Difficulty in school doesn't always stem from a learning disability. Anxiety, depression, stressful events, emotional trauma, and other conditions affecting concentration make learning

more of a challenge. In addition, ADHD and autism sometimes co-occur or are confused with learning disabilities.

- **ADHD** – Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), while not considered a learning disability, can certainly disrupt learning. Children with ADHD often have problems sitting still, staying focused, following instructions, staying organized, and completing homework.
- **Autism** – Difficulty mastering certain academic skills can stem from pervasive developmental disorders such as autism and Asperger's syndrome. Children with autism spectrum disorders May have trouble communicating, reading body language, learning basic skills, making friends, and making eye contact.

CAUSES OF LEARNING DISABILITIES

Understandably, one of the first questions parents ask when they learn their child has a Learning disorder is "Why? What went wrong?" Mental health professionals stress that since no one knows what causes learning disabilities, it doesn't help parents to look backward to search for possible reasons.

In most cases, the cause of a child's learning disability is unknown. Many causes have been proposed, a situation that probably reflects the highly diverse nature of students with learning disabilities. Just as there are different types of learning disabilities (e.g., dyslexia, language disabilities, math disabilities), there are likely to be different causes. Four suspected causal factors are brain damage, biochemical imbalance, and environmental causes.

Brain Damage or Dysfunction

Some professionals believe that all children with learning disabilities suffer from some type of brain injury or dysfunction of the central nervous system

Biochemical Imbalance

It was once theorized that biochemical disturbances within a child's body caused learning disabilities.

Environmental Factors

Although very difficult to document as primary causes of learning disabilities, environmental factors—particularly impoverished living conditions early in a child's life and poor instruction—probably contribute to the achievement deficits experienced by many children in this special education category.

MEASURES TAKEN FOR LEARNING DISABILITY

People with learning disabilities and disorders can learn strategies for coping with their disabilities. Getting help earlier increases the likelihood for success in school and later in life. If learning disabilities remain untreated, a child May begin to feel frustrated with schoolwork, which can lead to low self-esteem, depression, and other problems.¹

Usually, experts work to help a child learn skills by building on the child's strengths and developing ways to compensate for the child's weaknesses. Interventions vary depending on the nature and extent of the disability.

TEACHERS AND PARENTS ROLE IN HELPING CHILDREN WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES:

Teachers Role: Reporting a Learning Disability

Learning is a change in behaviour. Teachers understand the operation of the learning process. Senses expose the pupil to a world around them. These sensory stimuli are relayed to the brain for processing which causes altered behaviour patterns. It is not just an accumulation of facts. It is an aggregation of knowledge and understanding that causes these changes in behaviour. Pupils learn by doing and using as many senses as possible. A teacher stimulates a pupil's senses to accomplish learning. Teachers are on constant alert for failure to meet the desired objectives. Failure to accomplish these goals of learning can be attributed to the teacher or pupil. Teachers create environments. Learning is a common factor in all the artificial environments. The classroom is the environment that the teacher creates to facilitate learning. With the activities of learning, pupils are expected to become engaged. Over a period of time, the pupils within the environment grow and mature. The classroom environment is where learning is occurring. Teachers observe children in their role as a pupil. Within the environment of the classroom, teachers watch for pupils who are unable to work with other pupils or fail to change in behaviour or takes away from the beauty of the environment. Brains operate differently. Learning occurs in different manners. The teacher must be able to determine if a pupil is exhibiting an alternate learning pattern or if the pupil has a learning problem. If the teacher suspects there are a learning problem then it is necessary to seek assistance from the experts.

Try to identify behaviours under different circumstances. Teachers are neither psychologist nor psychiatrist. Teachers are teachers. They are experts at learning. A log entry should note a specific description of the behaviour. Logs should include observations regarding speech patterns, test/quiz scores, actions directed at other children, dress, marks, etc. Conferring with the Special Education consultant is the next step. Regular classroom teachers are experts at teaching approaches for the vast majority of pupils. Special Education teachers are experts at learning styles and alternate approaches to pupils who have a learning disability. Where the classroom teacher tends to focus on learning-at-a-classroom-of-pupils level, the special education teacher focuses on the individual student. They will offer advice and consul to the classroom teacher. Most of the schools have an established protocol to follow in identifying pupils with learning difficulties. Special education teachers provide an important resource for the classroom teacher. Special education teachers have a magic bag of alternate interventions that they might share.

1. Special Education Services

Children diagnosed with learning and other disabilities can qualify for special educational services. The Individuals_with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) requires that the school system provide free special education supports to children with disabilities.

IDEA states that children must be taught in the least restrictive environments appropriate for them. This means the teaching environment should be designed to meet a child's specific needs and skills and should minimize restrictions on the youngster's access to typical learning experiences.

2. IEPs

A child who qualifies for special education services should receive his or her own Individualized Education Program, or IEP. This personalized and written education plan:

- Lists individualized goals for the child
- Specifies the plan for services the youngster will receive
- Lists the specialists who will work with the child

Interventions for Specific Learning Disabilities

Below are just a few examples of ways educators/teachers can help children with specific learning disabilities.

Dyslexia

- **Special teaching techniques-** These can include helping a child learn through multisensory experiences and by providing immediate feedback to strengthen a child's ability to recognize words.
- **Classroom modifications-** For example, teachers can give students with dyslexia extra time to finish tasks and provide taped tests that allow the child to hear the questions instead of reading them.
- **Use of technology-** Children with dyslexia may benefit from listening to books on tape or using word-processing programs with spell-check features.

Dysgraphia

- **Special tools.**-Teachers can offer oral exams, provide a note-taker, and/or allow the child to videotape reports instead of writing them.
- **Use of technology.**-A child with dysgraphia can be taught to use word-processing programs or an audio recorder instead of writing by hand.
- **Other ways of reducing the need for writing-** Teachers can provide notes, outlines, and pre-printed study sheets.

Dyscalculia

- **Visual techniques.** For example, teachers can draw pictures of word problems and show the student how to use colored pencils to differentiate parts of problems.
- **Use of memory aids.** Rhymes and music are among the techniques that can be used to help a child remember math concepts.
- **Use of computers.** A child with dyscalculia can use a computer for drills and practice.

Dyspraxia

- **Quiet learning environment.** To help a child deal with sensitivity to noise and distractions, educators can provide the youngster with a quiet place for tests, silent reading, and other tasks that require concentration.
- **Alerting the child in advance.** For example, a child who is sensitive to noise may benefit from knowing in advance about such events as fire drills and assemblies.
- **Occupational therapy.** Exercises that focus on the tasks of daily living can help a child with poor coordination.

Other Treatments

A child with a learning disability may struggle with low self-esteem, frustration, and other problems. Mental health professionals can help the youngster understand these feelings, develop coping tools, and build healthy relationships.

Children with learning disabilities sometimes have other conditions such as ADHD. These conditions require their own treatments, which may include therapy and medications.

Tips for parents dealing with your child's learning disability

In this age of endless budget cuts and inadequately funded schools, your role in your child's education is more important than ever. Don't sit back and let someone else be responsible for providing your child with the tools they need to learn. You can and should take an active role in your child's education.

- **Keep things in perspective. A learning disability isn't insurmountable-** Remind yourself that everyone faces obstacles. It's up to you as a parent to teach your child *how* to deal with those obstacles without becoming discouraged or overwhelmed.
- **Become your own expert-** Do your own research and keep abreast of new developments in learning disability programs, therapies, and educational techniques.
- **Be an advocate for your child-** You may have to speak up time and time again to get special help for your child. Embrace your role as a proactive parent and work on your communication skills.
- **Remember that your influence outweighs all others-** Your child will follow your lead. If you approach learning challenges with optimism, hard work, and a sense of humour, your child is likely to embrace your perspective.

MEASURES:

ASSESSMENT TOOLS

Assessment is the process of gathering data from multiple sources about an individual's learning strengths and needs. This data is used to determine a student's skill level, and to plan next steps in learning. The purpose of assessment is to enrich both teachers' instructions and student's learning.

Assessment practices continue to evolve and educators get benefitted by keeping updated with new developments. Educators who are interested in learning more about assessment practices will consult with the school or the special education staff.

Employing a variety of types of assessment (formal and informal, qualitative and quantitative, norm referenced and criterion referenced) provides a fulsome understanding of a learner's strengths and needs.

1. Formal assessment involves systematic methods of data collection such as a test or quiz.
2. Informal assessment involves observation, use of Performance Standards, work samples, rating scales, anecdotal records, rubrics, checklists, inventories and/or portfolio assessments.
3. Qualitative assessment methods reveal how a student achieved the outcomes on the assessment.
4. Quantitative assessments provide actual scores that were achieved during the assessment.
5. Norm referenced tools compare an individual's performance to that of a large number of their peers.
6. Criterion referenced tools compare an individual's performance or skill level to a set of criteria.

Assessment tools can also be classified in terms of three levels; A, B and C. These levels are related to the training requirements for administering the test.

CONCLUSION

In the above study I have focused on classification of Learning Disability, Attitude towards Learning Disability, Techniques of teaching, and Interventions for Learning Disability. Here my study differs in focus to find out problems in teaching child having learning Disability. However I have also focused on remedial measures to deal with the issue of Learning Disability.

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