

LEARNING DISABLED CHILDREN

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ABSTRACT

Learning disabled children are those children who suffer from serious learning disabilities. These children essentially suffer from severely impaired learning efficiency to the extent that they essentially require special attention, care and remedial programs for the rectification of their learning problems and disabilities. Attention needs to be paid in terms of devising and adopting special education measures for rectification of the deficiencies and difficulties pertaining to specific learning abilities and skills.

KEYWORDS: Disabled, Children, Deficiency, Remedial, Provision, Learning, Disability, Behavior

Article History

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INTRODUCTION

Learning disabled children are those children who exhibit exceptionally inferior qualities and capacities in terms of learning and understanding in comparison to the normal children. Learning disability is a sort of handicap or helplessness that can be felt by the sufferer in terms of his academic performance in the same way as experienced by a physically handicapped person in terms of this physical functioning or by a mentally handicapped in terms of his mental functioning.

According to Kavale and Forness (1985): Children with learning disabilities belong to a group of the very diverse individual but they do share one common problem. They do not learn in the same way or as efficiently as their non-disabled peers. Although most possess normal intelligence, their academic performance significantly behind their classmates, some have great difficulty in learning mathematics, but most find the mastery of reading and writing to be their most difficult challenge.

According to Love, Harold D (1975), the child with learning disabilities is probably best described as one who manifests an educational discrepancy between his mental capacity for learning and his actual level of functioning.

Nature and Characteristics of Learning Disabled

- Learning Disabled Children Essentially Suffer From Symptoms of Hyperactivity and Attention Deficit. The Term Currently Used to Describe This Combination of Behavior Traits Is Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).
- They Demonstrate the Symptoms of Perceptual Motor Deficits In The Shape of Poor and Erratic

Performance In Writing; Drawing, Copying Geometrical Figures And Handling Instrument and Appliances.

- Most of Them May Suffer from Emotional Problems and Demonstrate Signs of Anxiety, Moodiness or Ups And Downs in Their Behavior.
- They May Exhibit Disorders of Memory, Thinking, Attention, General Coordination, Perception and Motor Functioning Etc.
- They Usually Exhibit The Following Learning Characteristics Responsible for Their Learning Impairment: Lack of Motivation, Inattention, Inability to Generalize, Lack of Adequate Ability In Problem Solving, Information Processing And Thinking Skills Etc.
- The Most Fundamental Characteristics of Learning Disabled Children is Specific and Significant Achievement Deficiency Pertaining at Least One Academic Content Area (Like, Reading, Writing, Listening and Speaking of Language, Reasoning Etc.)
- This Learning Impairment is so Severe That They Essentially Require Special Attention, Care and Remedial Programmes for the Rectification of Their Learning Problems and Disabilities.

Causes of Learning Disabilities

Depending on the types of learning disabilities found in the children a number of researches have been conducted to find out the possible causes of the factors causing learning disabilities:

1. Genetic or heredity factors: It has been found that many characteristics commonly found in learning disabled are transmitted from generation to generation. This relationship between inheritance and disabilities has been established on the basis of the following results:
 - Nearly 20 – 25% of hyperactive children have been found to have at least one parent of their nature.
 - Emotional imbalance, the disorder of memory and thinking, speech and learning have been found to run in families.
 - There is growing evidence that heredity may account for at least some family linkage with dyslexia.
2. Organic or physiological factors: Study of most learning disabled cares reveals that they suffer from malfunctioning of their central nervous system consisting of brain, spinal cord and message carrying nerves, etc. This is caused by factors like:
 - Brain damage caused by an accident or by a lack of oxygen before, during or after birth resulting in neurological difficulties that may affect their ability to learn.
 - Damage of injury caused by the spinal cord and message carrying nerves, etc. leading to their malfunctioning and subsequent learning difficulties.
 - Dysfunction of the central nervous system may be caused by biochemical imbalances generated by factors like –
 - Artificial coloring and flavoring in many of the food items consumed by children may cause

hyperactivity, impulsivity, emotional imbalance etc, leading to malfunctioning of the central nervous system.

- Vitamin deficiency may be caused the inability of a child's bloodstream to synthesize a normal amount of vitamins essential for normal functioning of the central nervous system.
- A number of medical problems suffered by the infants and young children like diabetes, meningitis, cardiac arrest, pediatric AIDS may prove a potent factor for the neurological dysfunction in the growing child.

3. Environmental factors: In many cases, learning disabilities may be caused by the improper and uncongenial conditions and factors present in an individual's physical, social, cultural and educational environment. Some of those factors may be cited asunder:

- The poor nourishment and defective environment received by the factors in the mother's womb.
- Premature delivery, uncongenial and improper environmental settings at the time of birth or a defect in the central nervous system.
- Diet deficiency in the early age, severe diseases, accidents and injuries that may cause central nervous system dysfunction.
- Children who do not receive proper medical care and attention and as a result suffer from any impairment in their senses of hearing, sight, taste, touch and other neurological functioning become handicapped in terms of learning.
- Insufficient early experiences and stimulation in terms of learning and acquisition received on account of the defective educational set-up.
- Inadequate instruction received on account of their own family set-up or lack of motivation, skill and ability on the part of teachers.
- Use of drugs and intoxicating substance like consumption of alcohol.
- Imitation and the company of defective learning models present in one's cultural, social and educational environment.
- Social and cultural deprivation.

Educational Provision for the Learning Disabled

No uniform treatment or remedial measure can be prescribed to all the learning disabled. Each one of them is to be cured and treated as a separate and individual care. This is why great care should be taken for the proper identification of the nature and amount of learning disability and disabilities of a particular child. The following measures can be given:

- **Provision of Specialized Schools or Classes:** This provision is based on the assumption that learning disabled children are quite distinct from other children of their schools or classes. They cannot be taught along with others as they suffer from severe learning deficiencies. Hence there should be special schools or separate

classes for them where they can be taught by specialized teachers through special methods with greater care and attention.

In the specialized schools, learning disabled children, thus find a completely-specialized segregated setting. In such schools, along with instructions related to academic subjects, experiences related to social and co-curricular activities are also provided along with the other normal students.

- **Provision of Special Remedial and Educational Programs:** Proper identification of the nature, type and amount of learning difficulties or deficiencies can be made. Then proper special remedial and educational programs may be made out of the ready-made programs available in the market of other places having provision of such educational services. The research center of the college of Education, DIET's, SCERT, NCERT, Extension Department of Universities and many other social and community organizations usually provide such educational services and thus we may obtain the necessary help from these centers.
- **Structuring and Improving the Existing Environmental Set-Up:** Many of the difficulties and deficiency of the children are caused by the uncongenial, improper and negative factors present in their physical, social, cultural and educational; environment. Therefore, an attempt should be made for the adequate structuring and improving the existing environmental set-up. Great care should be taken by the parents and teachers, to pick up proper methods of learning, communication, perceptual motor movements and general coordination, etc. Effort should be made to restructure and improve the facilities provided by the school in order to suit the individual learners according to their needs, interests and abilities. There must be proper integration of theory with practice as well as curricular with co-curricular activities. Method of teachings should be so structured as to cater to the needs and difficulties of the learning disabled present in a particular group, a section or as a class. Learning disabled children must be given full opportunity and training and modifying their undesirable and in appropriate social-emotional and psycho-educational behavior.

Whether we employ specialized trained teachers or the usual classroom teachers, one should not lose patience as these children are essentially slow learners, underachievers and far from satisfactory in their socio-psychological behavior. They should be accepted with all their weaknesses and deficiencies. We should be very constructive and such children to develop required self – confidence and positive attitude of their educational progress with the help of men and material resources available. The learning disabled children should be helped in overcoming their deficits deficiencies in skills like spelling, handwriting, memory, verbal expression, experimentation, thinking and reasoning skills, visual and auditory perception and social skills etc.

Remedial Measures

1. **Handwriting:** Poor handwriting may be one of the major learning deficiency found in the learning disabled. Steps should be taken for improving their handwriting right from the early diagnosis and identification of such deficiency among them. Some of the following measures can be taken into consideration.
 - Since lack of proper motor control may be one of the causes of their poor handwriting, we must try to overcome it by adopting the following means.
 - Using manipulative exercise like writing in sands, modeling through clay games, doing chalkboard

practice etc. can be encouraged.

- Helping them learn a proper position and form for writing. For this purpose they must be made to learn that while writing on the paper with the pencil or pen, the paper should not be kept slant while writing and the writing instrument should be held between thumb and middle finger with index finger applying pressure.
 - Children should be made to learn proper figuring letters. Eg; Make use of colored directional cues such as green arrows and red dots.
 - Children should be given sufficient practice and help for writing in straight lines.
 - Children should be made to write lightly by maintaining proper links and gaps between the lines and curves of the letter as well as words and sentences.
 - There should not be overwriting, cutting or overlapping in their manuscript.
2. **Spelling:** Many of the learning disabled may suffer from difficulties in writing words with the correct spelling. To help them in this direction start framing a list of words usually misspelt by a child and make the child learn the correct spellings- one word at a time.
- Write the word with the correct spelling on the chalkboard or paper, ask the child to look at the correct spelt word and compare it with the one he has written. Ask him to pronounce the word with its correct spelling and ask him to repeat its pronunciation. The correctly spelt word on the paper or chalkboard spelling out all letters. He may then be asked to compare his spelling with the one already written on the chalkboard or paper. He may then be asked to write twice or thrice, the need may be for learning its proper spelling. For further practice, he may be given for writing a text or manuscript in which this particular word is repeated a sufficient number of times.
 - Teach generalization by focusing on phonemic spelling patterns (i.e., illustrating the big ideas underlying the spellings).
3. **Reading Skills:** Learning disabled children may exhibit their weakness and poor performance with regard to reading and comprehension of text material or manuscript. While dealing with the children suffering from reading skill disabilities, a diagnostic prescriptive approach must be adopted and hence any remedial program for bringing improvement in their reading skills must be in tune with their individual needs and abilities like below.
- Children who cannot pronounce a word letter or sound correctly should receive phonetics guidance and drill to overcome their deficiencies.
 - Children suffering from an improper style of reading should be provided with model reading. A teacher, a model student or a recording device may be used for this purpose.
 - Children who feel difficulty in comprehension should be treated with multi- sensory techniques. Use of stories, narration of personal experiences, oral discussion etc, proves to be helpful.

4. **Thinking and Reasoning abilities:** The learning disabled mostly suffer from lack of proper reasoning and thinking ability. To overcome this following procedure can be adopted:
- Initially they may be asked to collect data by reading, listening, observing or doing.
 - Then they may be asked to analyze the data by finding the similarities and dissimilarities.
 - At a later stage they may be asked to find some other ways of categorizing and classifying this data. In this way, they may be directed to free thinking, creative and divergent thinking, etc.
 - They may also be helped in making alternative predictions, hypothesis and test the validity and the prediction for arriving at some valid conclusions in order to help them in the acquisition of useful knowledge, skills or art and techniques for better learning.
5. **Social Skills:** To help the learning disabled from exhibiting poor performance, following steps can be followed:
- Adequate provision must be provided for co-curricular activities, hobbies, classes etc.
 - Children should be given the proper opportunities and help them to build up self-confidence to overcome their shyness, rigidity, etc. They must be helped in sharing their thoughts and actions with others.
 - They must be helped in learning the social skills, group participation and social interaction with the help of pre-arranged structural learning situations.
 - Teachers with the help of useful instructional material and developed technology should try to transmit useful personal, social experiences and skills to these children so as to improve their social behavior and social interaction.
6. **Attention Deficit:** Most of the learning disabled children suffer from attention deficit. These children may be helped in some of the following ways:-
- The teachers should focus on these children, by making their sitting arrangement in the centre of the classroom. Individual attention and extra care should be given. They should be given enough opportunities for classroom interaction.
 - Appropriate and interesting methods to provide information should be used. c. Involve the students in the teaching-learning process.
 - Make use of reinforcement, appreciation and rewards.
 - Make the practical work, homework and assignment more interesting and purposeful.
 - Teach the students to practice self-restraint and overcome inappropriate behavior.

CONCLUSIONS

Learning disability refers to a group of disorders relating to acquisition and use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning, mathematical abilities and social skills.

Learning disabled children are identified by their gross discrepancy in ability and achievement, inattentiveness, wrong perception and organization difficulties.

Characteristics of learning disabled children include hyperactivity, perceptual motor impairment, emotional liability, disorders in speech and learning, language difficulties in reception and expression, and reading troubles or dyslexia.

Educational provisions consist of day school, special class in a regular school and integrated classroom. In order to teach these children general instructional techniques, use of memory training strategies, phonic approach, language experience approach, programmed instruction, etc, are used with differential effectiveness.

The role of special teachers includes awareness and adoption of small group instruction, classroom arrangement, equipments and materials, multi-sensory teaching and direct instruction. The regular teacher has to make classroom personalized and accepting, encouraging, motivating with appropriate task analysis.

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