

Impact of Learning Disabilities on the Behaviour of Secondary School Children

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Abstract

Education is a behavior forming activity, while permanent change in the behavior of a person is known as learning. It is gained by the senses (listening, reading, watching and doing etc.). The more the senses are used during the process of acquiring knowledge, the easier it will be to comprehend. There are a number of children in classrooms with normal body and appearance but with certain hidden disabilities, which could not disfigure or leave visible signs while they study in the class along with other normal students. Present study attempts to identify students with learning disabilities and evaluate their behavior with school teachers and classmates along with their habits. A sample of 14 private schools of Qasimabad, A tlaka of Hyderabad, Pakistan was selected as sample of study. Two tools, one for identification of LD students and second for evaluating their behavior and habits were used. It was found that students with LD remain mostly silent but become easily hyper. Mostly they do not take part in games. Keeping in view the findings suggestions were given for schools, teachers and parents.

Introduction

All the children are different in their physical, social, emotional and intellectual levels in schools. Some are ranked as above average, some are ranked as average while others are below average (slow learners). These are natural differences in their rate of development. Different children have different learning problems but not all the problems are necessarily learning disabilities and specific criteria must be kept in mind while diagnosing a learning disability. Because "Learning Disability (LD) is a mental disorder of a person in which his/her mental ability to interpret what he hear and see is affected or he is

unable to link among information present in different parts of brain. The mental disorder can be seen in many ways, i.e., difficulty in written or spoken language, co-ordination problem, self-control problem, or attention problem.

Learning disability Defined

LD many be defined as impairments of brain that hinder the acquisition, organization, retention and understanding of information. (learning disabilities Association 2010).

“According to Harward (1988) learning disability is an ailment in one or more fundamental learning processes in which language, written or spoken is used and this condition can be pointed out through listening, speaking, thinking, reading, writing, spelling or in doing mathematical calculations. A learning disability (Mandell & Fiscus, 1981) is a psychological disorder concerning difficulty in the understanding of, or use, of spoken or written language.

Types of learning disabilities

LDs are disorders that start with the defect of one or more than one proesses of mind related to:

1. Perceiving
2. Thinking
3. Remembering

According to J. Creechan (1992), these processes may include:

Table 1. Processes related to Learning disabilities

1	Language Processing
2	Phonological processing
3	Visual-spatial processing
5	Processing Speed
6	Memory and attention

Characteristics of learning disabilities

The conditions associated with the term of L.D. are brain injuries, handicaps, dyslexia, dysfunction and developmental aphasia. The

problems which are the result of mental retardation, hearing or visual handicaps, and environmental, cultural or economic problems are not associated with the term of learning disabilities.

The symptoms of this disorder are difficulty in writing of any language, or writing its correct spelling, sometime child feel problem in reading and in counting. The child also feel difficulty in putting things in correct order and get confused easily to put the letters and number in right or left and feels problem in writing numbers in ascending and descending order.

The terms used to describe psychological disorders include dyslexia, minimum brain dysfunction, brain injury, perceptual handicaps and developmental aphasia. Many more categories fall into one of the three general categories: Inadequate learning environments (home and / or school); and not related to organic problems; Minor organic difficulties exaggerated because of poor environment; significant inherent organic problems that handicap children's ability to learn despite appropriate environment.

Wallace and Kauffman, 1978 have outlined nine areas of children's behaviour that teachers can observe and use to judge whether or not children exhibit learning problems. These areas include Low self-esteem, disturbed relation with peers, inappropriate relationships to teachers, parents and other authority figures, other signs of social-emotional problems like deficits in speech and language, disordered temporal relationships, difficulties in auditory and visual perception, poor quantitative reasoning and computational skill and deficits in basic motor skills." Learning disabilities can be divided into three broad categories and each category is associated with a number of disorders. These categories are (1) Speech and language disorders, and (2) Academic skill disorders.

Though these disabilities varies person to person, but the common characteristics shown are phonological processing and/or rapid visual-verbal responding. The person with attention disorders appears to dream excessively and on getting their attention they are often easily diverted. These types of children like to live in their own dream life and are found to be comfortable with children younger than their own age. In schools, if this problem remains unidentified or unnoticed, then the children are passed from class to class without getting the special assistance from anyone they need. The attention

deficit children are often hyperactive, mostly during the question answer sessions in the classroom; they tend not to wait for their turn and blurt out answers and interrupt others. Similarly, in games and other physical activities, they cannot wait for their turn. Because of their constant motion and explosive energy, hyperactive children often get into trouble with parents, teachers and peers. Attention disorders with or without hyperactivity, are not considered learning disabilities in themselves. However, because attention problems can seriously interfere with school performance, they often accompany academic skill disorders.

Objectives of the Study

The present study is carried out to identify the LD children in Secondary Schools; additionally the habits and behavior of those students have been evaluated.

Condition in Pakistan

In Pakistan, the literacy rate is 54 percent (MOE, 2004), and most of the parents have no awareness about Dyslexia, which results in more and more children affected by learning disorders to be left behind in school. These children become more & more frustrated, feel like a failure and exhibit self-esteem problem which lead to negative behavior & other problem such as attention deficit/ hyperactivity disorder, conduct disorder & oppositional defiant disorder.

Unfortunately, most school teachers are unaware of this disability and do not give particular attention to the students who are quiet and polite in their classrooms, hence they often go unnoticed. The students with above average intelligence, who manage to maintain passing grades despite their disability, are even less likely to be identified. While those who are hyperactive and do not sit silently and extraordinarily active in the class are identified quickly by their impulsive behavior.

School dropout rate is linked strongly to low enrollment. Teens that dropout are at a higher risk of becoming involved in illegal activities, leading to incarceration & are also predisposed to become teen mothers & fathers. Teen addictions, aggressive & other antisocial behaviors, & risky pregnancies are therefore linked to learning disabilities.

Population and Sample of Study

The focus of the study is on one type of Academic skill disorders i.e. Developmental reading Disorders or Dyslexia. For this purpose the population of the study was taken from the private secondary schools of Hyderabad district. Hyderabad district consist of three Talukas. The Taluka Qasimabad consists of 28 private secondary schools, from which 50% were taken as the sample of the study. Due to time & financial constraints, A questionnaire was developed as the instrument for this study and 42 teachers from 14 private schools located in Qasimabad Taluka were sampled. Three language (Sindhi, Urdu and English) and one mathematics teacher were selected from the same class of each of the schools.

Tools of Study

In order to collect data researcher used two tools. Classroom Monitoring Scale: “classroom self-Monitoring Scale” by McConnell, M. E. (1999) (appendix A) was adopted by the teacher. The classroom self-Monitoring scale had helped the researcher to find out the students with learning disabilities.

Teacher prepared a questionnaire to inquire the preferences, habits and educational condition of students with learning abilities. Basically the questionnaire was developed in English but the same was translated in Urdu and Sindhi.

Pilot Study

After translation and proof read by an educational expert the same questionnaire.

A pilot study was conducted in the month of March and April 2007. According to (Borg, 1987) Pilot study is the way which minimizes bias and flaws in design of a research tool. Pilot study show flaws in questionnaire and instructions. Through this questions are checked and inappropriate and useless items are removed (Bell, 1987).

The researchers themselves went for the pilot study and the questionnaire was administrated to three teachers of different schools, for checking the language and clarity of the questionnaire. The questions, which were not clear, needed more explanation or language structure, were identified and improved.

Data Collection

After removal of the ambiguity and improvement of the language of the questionnaire, a team was selected for the data collection purpose, although all questionnaires sent out were returned; certain questions were not fully answered.

This team consisted of M.Ed students who had already studied the research as a subject in their first semester. This team was prepared for the purpose and sent for the data collection process.

Analysis of Data

First of all the students with learning disabilities were identified through classroom Monitoring Scale. When the students were identified then a questionnaire was administered on the teachers who were teaching those students. Those students were selected who had scored 13 to 0. These students were treated as students with learning disabilities.

The researcher arranged the data in a systematic way and organized it in table form. After tabulation, the researcher analyzed the data and expressed it in percentages.

Table 2. Responses of Teachers and Parents

S. No	Statements	Yes per-cent	No per-cent	Cumulative percent	Differences
1	Presence at school	60	40	100	40
2	Have friends	42	58	100	16
3	Confuse while playing with other classmates	65	35	100	30
4	Feel hesitation in reading	82	18	100	64
5	Weak in mathematics	74	26	100	48
6	Don't participate question answer	89	11	100	78
7	Lack of confidence	78	22	100	56
8	Take part in games	55	45	100	10
9	Feel pronunciation problems	63	37	100	26
10	Disturbing the class	12	88	100	76
11	Well in studies	23	77	100	-54
12	Complete their homework	67	33	100	34

Findings of the Study:

1. It was found that the students' drifts in their dreams, are present in every class but the percentage varies from 5% to 10%. Most of

them like to play with younger boys / girls of their own sex and exhibit confusion while talking or playing or participating in any activity with their classmate. Also they tend to not do well in their studies and most of them fail their exams.

2. These students neither took part in any activity nor liked to work in groups, and hence were usually behind their classmates in terms of progress.
3. Most of them did not reply to questions asked in the classroom, but when they knew the answer, they did not wait for being asked to answer and became hyper active and even ready to fight.
4. It was also found that nearly 8 to 15 % students of the schools' population were affected by reading disabilities, while very few students had problem in pronunciation. Some of these students had problem in writing also and some time they wrote in mirror image also.
5. These students did not come to school by their own choice, especially during sports week / games day. They did not take part in any curricular activity.
6. It was also found that most of these students did not create problems in the class except for a few exceptions. Most of them remained silent all the time and did not disturb the class or creates any problems and hence remain unidentified.
7. Many of the teachers had discussed the problem with the parents of these children. Some of the parents believed the teachers while others became aggressive and did not like to listen to anything negative about their children, specially the parents of children who were promoted to the next class along with their fellows.
7. Most of the teachers were unaware of this deficiency specially learning disabilities because they thought that all the children having normal/healthy looking bodies had the normal brain activity as well. But the teachers were willing to study about dyslexia and wanted to know about it and other learning disabilities so that they could identify and help such students.

Suggestions:

Children are the future of a nation. The nations, which are saving their children today, are actually paying attention to their future. One cannot

overestimate the importance of a school, as the school is a place where the future generation is prepared, nor can one over emphasize the importance of a teacher as the teacher is a maker of the nation and destiny of a nation is framed in his / her hands inside the classroom. A school or a teacher cannot give the desired results until and unless the parents of the children did not get involved in their development. Therefore the present article gives the following suggestion for the schools, teachers and parents.

For Schools:

Teachers should be made aware of dyslexia and other types of learning disabilities at the time of selection for the profession, either by the schools or by the government.

Schools should frequently ask their teachers to identify and inform the administration about children having learning difficulties.

There should be psychologist cum Learning specialist in the schools on permanent basis who should identify the disability and suggest suitable study plan in the same school (if possible) or refer the children to Special Education Schools. Schools should provide special education programmes in separate all-day classrooms or as special education classes that the affected students attend for several hours each day.

Schools should frame a cumulative record of every child, specially the children with learning disabilities to mark every year progress and development.

School should organize special meetings with the parents of these children where they should be taken in confidence about the education of their child and advised for special care and attention at home.

For Teachers:

Teachers' must identify children in their class which have learning difficulties. They should pay proper attention to these students and must be careful while screening them.

The teachers must know their student's strengths along with the weakness and disabilities because these type of children are more active in other activities and Should therefore encourage such children in their areas of interest outside the classroom. Teachers can change classroom routines to help children with learning disabilities.

For Parents:

The parents should meet their children's teachers, tutors, and school support personnel to understand performance levels, and attitudes toward school. They should also observe their child's ability to study, complete homework, and finish tasks that are assigned at home.

- 1 Parents of the children with learning disabilities should meet the child's teachers about the possibilities of reading written information aloud, allowing extra time on exams, taping lessons, and using technology to help them.
- 2 Parents must take interest in the learning as well as overall development of their children and should meet and discuss with teachers and school authority about their progress. They also must be aware of the cumulative record of the child. Parents must understand the development and needs of their children and if there is the need to send them to Special Education Schools, they should not hesitate in doing so. If there is no such need, they should work closely with the teachers and plan for their child according to his/her condition.
- 3 Parents and teachers should make the child aware about the learning disability they have in such a way that the child does not get depressed and/or frustrated or start feeling inferior.

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Appendix 1 Classroom Self- Monitoring Scale

Classroom Self-Monitoring Scale				
NAME: _____		DATE: _____		
CLASS: _____		TEACHER: _____		
Circle one of the four choices 4 = Always 3 = Most of the time 2 = Some of the time 1 = Did not do				
1.	Worked without disturbing others.	4	3	2 1
2.	Participated in class.	4	3	2 1
3.	Listened and paid attention when the teacher was talking.	4	3	2 1
4.	Asked for help when I needed it.	4	3	2 1
5.	Followed teacher directions.	4	3	2 1
6.	Completed class assignment.	4	3	2 1
7.	Turned in complete assignment.	4	3	2 1
		Student Score _____		
28-24 SUPER 23-20 GOOD 19-14 FAIR 13-0 MAKE A PLAN				