

CHAPTER-I

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A child's world is full of dreams and fancies. His cognitive abilities revolve around his own style of perceiving things, his own style of perceiving, conserving, understanding. Yet we find at times; the child is incapable of responding to simple queries, to general questions. The child faces problems in reading, comprehending. The child may encounter problems in writing - as it may be messy & immature, i.e., to say that the school performance of the child illustrates the pattern evident in most students with Learning Disabilities. The child is not capable of going to the complex process of mental growth in which everyday a different faculty of the child is being developed.

But very surprisingly, the child is likable & very interested in learning. He is otherwise bright, active in class. So, accordingly, the child behaves and responds in an absolutely different way as compared to the expected performance & obtained results. So accordingly every day the child behaves & responds differently or in an absolutely different way as compared to the performance in examination, very surprisingly for us.

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Rightly named as 'hidden handicap' specific learning disabilities are difficult to identify before academic learning begins in a child. As rightly pointed out by Mercer (1987) accurate early indicators are rather subtle in children with learning disabilities and may vary in degree, occurring within a wide range of behaviours. However, with the advances in science and technology and awareness created among professionals and parents, efforts towards early identification is initiated in the field of learning disabilities. It is now possible to identify the psychoneurological defects by the time the child is 5 years old and to predict with confidence, at the time the child enters kindergarten whether or not the child will fail academically (Silver and Hagin, 1990)

Yet, prediction of required skills for academic learning is not easy as it involves not

only psycho-neurological functions, but also factors such as preferred sensory modalities. Phonic awareness and individual differences among the learners.

Satz et al, who have conducted numerous studies on early identification observed that children who are delayed in visual perception and cross modality skills at young age (5-6 years) may fail in reading. The theory also predicts that these children will eventually 'catch up' on the other early delayed skills, but will subsequently lag in conceptual linguistic skills (Silver and Hagin, 1990)

Leigh (1986) has rightly argued that learning disabilities is generally looked at as a school based problem and a pervasive attitude prevails which is incorrect. Considering the implications through the life span, attention to pre and post school ages also is imperative.

1.1. LEARNING :

Learning consist of relatively, persistant changes in possible behaviour in so far as they derive from experience. Learning is primarily the sense of acquisition & alteration of cognitive structures.

Learning is desirable behaviour or change be modification of behaviour. For the learning to occur many factors act upon it, and various strategies of learning are to adopted for effective & efficient learning.

1.2 Hidden Disabilities

According to James E. Ysseldyke & Bob Algozzine (1998)" Puzzling" is the term researches use to describe these hidden disabilities. Students who have difficulty learning to read since the first grade. Now they can read grade IV material reasonably well, but they still have problems comprehending what they have read.

These children have 'Hidden disabilities' because their strength in some areas often

mask or hide learning problems in others. You might remember a person in one of your schools who seemed quite bright, but who has trouble mastering information skills that came easily to others.

Some had trouble reading, others do poorly in spelling. Still others could read & spell well but made frequent errors in mathematics. These are identified as students with learning problems.

A category not physically, mentally, emotionally sensory disabled but in different ways i.e. disabled to learn properly.

Heinz Werner, Alfred A. Straus & their associates perceived the need to make a separate category. The subject of new field were given various names children with perceptual handicapped, brain injured children. But it was Samuel A. Kirk who formally defined such children in 1963 and gave a new name, children with "Learning Disabilities". The term has become most acceptable because it emphasises the educational character of such children.

1.3 Specific Learning Disability

According to the federal guidelines implemented under the individual with disabilities education act, specific learning disability 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 imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell or to do mathematical calculation. The term includes such conditions as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia & 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 disturbance or of environmental, cultural or economic disadvantage.

1.4 EARLY INDICATORS

Spatial temporal relationships, body image, auditory sequencing, right-left discrimination and visual perceptual skills are some aspects that can be noticed early in life of the child before academic skills begin, which in turn can help as indicators of probable learning problems later. The description of developmental learning difficulties by Kirk and Chalfant (1984) has applicability for pre-school children. It includes those pre-requisite skills that the child needs in order to achieve the academic subjects. To learn to write his or her name, a child must have developed prerequisite skills in perception motor and eye-hand coordination, sequencing and memory. To learn to read, a child must have developed adequate visual and auditory discrimination, visual and auditory memory, language and related operations. Thus antecedents of specific learning difficulties can be noticed in pre-school children.

Badian (1988), as quoted in Bender (1992), reported 9 year follow up phase of a longitudinal study of 116 students. Each student was assessed at 4 years using battery of assessments-intelligence, language, fine and gross motor and readiness skills. Scores were used to predict scores on reading comprehension administered at 8th year 75% of the poor readers in 8th grade could have been identified by using pre-school test. Also 89% of good readers could have been identified.

1.5 LEARNING PROBLEMS

A general term used to describe individuals who demonstrate a discrepancy between the expected level of achievement and their actual achievement.

Children with special learning problems exhibit a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding in using spoken or written languages. These may be manifested in disorders of listening, thinking, talking, reading, writing, spelling or arithmetic. They include conditions which have been referred to as perceptual handicaps, brain injury, minimal brain disfunction, dyslexia, developmental phasia etc. They do not include learning

problems which are due primarily to visual, hearing or motor - handicaps to mental retardation, emotional disturbance or to environmental disadvantage

1.6 CRITERIA FOR DETERMINING THE EXISTENCE OF A LEARNING PROBLEM.

(a) A team may determine that a child has a specific learning problem if :

(1) The child does not achieve commensurate with his/her age & ability levels in one or more of the areas. When provided with learning experiences appropriate for the child's age & ability levels.

(2) The team finds that a child has a severe discrepancy between achievement & intellectual ability in one or more of following areas :

- (i) Oral Expression
- (ii) Listening comprehension
- (iii) Written expression
- (iv) Basic Reading skill
- (v) Reading comprehension
- (vi) Mathematics comprehension
- (vii) Mathematics calculation

In effect, any given state indicates that they are variations & these lead to problems. These are termed as learning problems.

1.7 IDENTIFIED EARLY INDICATORS

The earlier the causes of the disability are traced, the better it is to serve, i.e., the 'earlier the better'. Further, leading to ease in Diagnosis. Thus, this preventive study was taken,

just as prevention is better than cure.

Thus the following early indicators was identified and notice early in life of the child before academic skills begin.

1. Hyperactivity
2. Difficulty following Verbal Instruction
3. Difficulty following Visual Perception
4. Difficulty in conserving
5. Spatial Orientation (Spatial temporal relationship)
6. Auditory blending .
7. Unable to organize information.
8. Distractibility.
9. Perseveration.
10. Memory.
11. Poor gross motor coordination
12. Clumsy in mobility.
13. Poor Eye Hand Coordination
14. Impulsivity.
15. Lack of interest
16. Difficulty in oral expression.

1.7.1. Hyperactivity :

Learning disabled children may be hyperactive. This is particularly true among those with actual brain insult. These children have been described as restless, fidgety, unable to sit still. It is not always that any action is much a problem in triple-time is problem to others.

Because he is doing so much he is certain to cause trouble sooner or later. Also with so much movement it is difficult for him to attend to anything long enough to achieve much academically.

1.7.2. Difficulty in Verbal Instruction

Unable to follow instructions & thus needs to be told repeatedly & responses are also confused & delayed.

1.7.3. Difficulty following Visual Perception

These might include disorders of visual, auditory, actual or kinesthetic perception. Less likely are disorders of olfactory or gustatory perception, however these result in lesser academic problems.

The child with visual perceptual problems may not be able to copy letters correctly, or to perceive the difference between a hexagon & an octagon. He may reverse letters or produce mirror writing. The child with auditory perception problems may not perceive the difference between various consonant blends or be able to differentiate between the front door bell & the first ring of the telephone.

1.7.4. CONSERVATION

According to Piaget's theory the ability to retain a concept of area, mass, length etc., when superficial changes are made in the appearance of an object / scene.

1.7.5. SPATIAL ORIENTATION

This refers to the understanding of position in space & the relationship between themselves & the objects around them. Children with poor spatial orientation cannot recognize objects shapes when placed in different positions. He sees letters transposed Eg. 'd' as 'b', 'p' as 'q', 'm' as 'w' etc or viceversa.

1.7.6. AUDITORY BLENDING

This early indicator hinders the enhancement capacity & ability to understand, follow and comprehend spoken language, frequently sees letters transposed or in reverse order.

1.7.7. UNABLE TO ORGANISE INFORMATION

Highly disorganized manner of working careless, inexact, very slovenly

1.7.8. DISTRACTIBILITY

Tendency to be easily drawn away from any task at hand & to focus an extraneous stimulus of the moment.

1.7.9. PERSEVERATION

A may persevere or repeat persistently, in almost any behavioural area, but this is mostly seen in writing or copying. A child may copy a word over & over again involuntarily. He may also persevere in oral response.

1.7.10. MEMORY DISORDERS

This may include either auditory/visual memory. Memory is a complex process & is not fully understood, although various individuals have established theories that explain various observable facets of memory.

Eg. Children - cannot repeat a simple sequence of 3 words immediately after hearing them. This kind of auditory memory deficit seriously affects the learning process.

1.7.11. POOR GROSS MOTOR CO-ORDINATION

Although highly coordinated children may have learning problems, lack of coordination is often observed in children with Learning Disabilities's. The younger school child with

Learning Disabilities's is often slower to develop the ability to throw or catch a ball, to skip, to run. He is also likely to have difficulty in writing & other fine motor skills. He may be just generally clumsy in mobility, he may stumble or fall frequently. Some coordination problems are actually related to kinesthetic perceptual problems, an inability to properly assess position in space, balance or both.

1.7.12. Clumsy in Mobility :

Its major attributes are frequent accidents or frequently bumped in to things or people or got hurt physically.

1.7.13. POOR EYE-HAND COORDINATION

It is the inability to integrate body movements & visual skills.

1.7.14. Impulsivity

Initiation of sudden action without sufficient forethought or prudence.

1.7.15. LACK OF INTEREST :

It is a matter of actual inability to focus on any particular activity for any length of time. The child has over anxiety, careless, talks too much & loudly, which are not child's playfulness but characteristics of Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD).

The main reason for this factor is a minor injury to brain or dysfunction. The % of such children in an average class is 3% to 5% & majority of parents & teachers are unable to recognize them. These children are unable to concentrate hence are not able to do their work timely & effectively. Such children are not able to continue their studies for longer time & face problems in learning anything.

1.7.16. Difficulty in Oral Expression

Difficulty in pronouncing specific syllables or sound while speaking

1.8 NEED & IMPORTANCE of study

The presence of several of these early indicators by their very nature, may likely lead to learning problems. Some combinations of these characteristics are more like to cause difficulties in abstract, symbolic learning - such as reading or mathematics & thus be a part of the syndrome which is called a learning disabilities when such characteristics have resulted from a known instance (Eg. brain damage) the causation is assured. In many instances the real 'cause' of the learning disabilities is not known.

It is verified that the existence of a significant discrepancy between apparent ability to learn & actual learning exists.

Thus these characteristics were studied in detail through this study to simply part out the causes from the total picture.

If we have to check wastage of educational or human resources, to achieve the vision of Universal Elementary Education (UEE) i.e. Education spanning of first eight years of schooling has to be done effectively. therefore concrete steps should be taken to sop or overcome learning problems at an early stage as early as possible.

1.9 STATEMENT of THE problem

The study specifically reads as : " **A study of early indicators of learning problems in schools.**"

1.10 RESEARCH QUESTIONS :

- ✓ What is the extent to which children exhibit the problem of identified early indicators ?
- ✓ How far parents & teachers vary in their responses to each early indicator ?

- ✓ What is the intensity of response to each item or attributes?
- ✓ Are there any gender differences in terms of early indicators ?
- ✓ Are there any class-wise difference in terms & early indicators ?

1.11 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY :

- a. To identify student with learning problems at primary stage (Grade 3-5)
- b. To identify & list some of the aspects that can be noticed, early in life of the child before academic skill begin, which in turn can help as indicators of possible learning problems later.
- c. To elicit information from the parents and teachers of children having specific learning problem on the early symptoms as perceived by them.
- d. To suggest preventive measures for pre - school years.

1.12 DELIMITATIONS

1. The study have been restricted to public or private schools of Bhopal city.
2. Those schools were identified or selected which had pre-schooling also i.e. Nursery or kindergarten
3. Criteria for selection of students was limited to the instruction & orientation given by the researcher.
4. Students continuing same school i.e. from pre schooling to primary were included in the sample to the teachers.
5. The study was confined to III, IV & V grades learners only.