

A Study on Students' Learning Difficulties while learning English Language

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Abstract

Different students have different kinds of learning capacities. Many have some kind of learning disability but all of them don't have the same solution. Here are 5 learning disabilities teachers should know how to identify. When it comes to teaching, there's no one-method-fits-all solution that can be implemented. Imparting knowledge is a process that is highly dependent on the student's innate abilities, and the ability to grasp knowledge. In some cases, students might be quick learners, while some might not, and would require more time to process the information being taught to them. There's also a section of students who face learning disabilities. Hence, there is a heightened need for educational institutes and teachers to be able to identify such students, and work with them to help them excel in their careers. In order to do so, they must first be able to recognise, and identify signs of learning disabilities. This paper intend to study the students learning difficulties and the processes to overcome them.

Key Words: class room, difficulties, learning, questions, students, teacher, understanding

Introduction

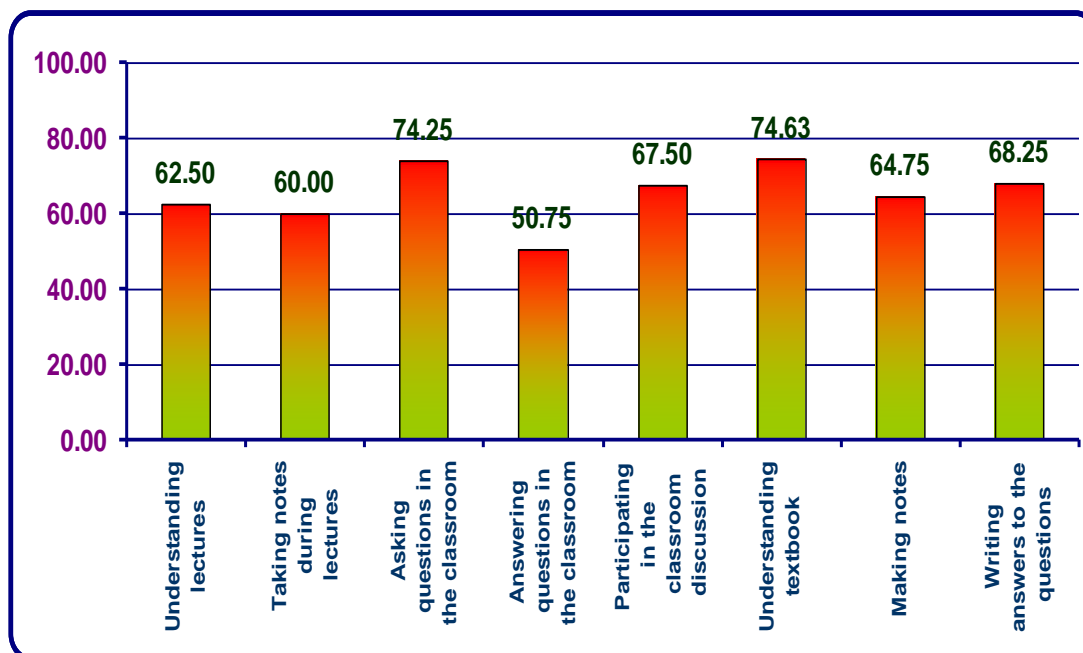
Learning difficulty is a condition that can cause an individual to experience problems in a traditional classroom learning context. There are different types of learning difficulties that may interfere with literacy skills development and math. They can also affect memory, ability to focus and organizational skills. A child or adult with a learning difficulty may require additional time to complete assignments at school and can often benefit from strategy instruction and classroom accommodations, such as material delivered in special fonts or the ability to use a computer to take notes. No two individuals with a learning difficulty are exactly alike and many conditions, such as dyslexia, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), dyscalculia, and dysgraphia, exist on a wide-spectrum. There is also dyspraxia, a motor-skills difficulty that can affect a learner's ability to write by hand, and may impact planning skills.

The questionnaire was designed to know about teachers understanding of their students' difficulties in learning and using English. List of nine possible difficulties were provided to the teachers along with an option where they could include some other difficulties which they feel their students face. To name a few of the difficulties that are being listed out, understanding lectures, taking notes during lecture, asking questions in classroom, and understanding textbook are some of them.

Item wise mean percentages as perceived by teachers with respect to students learning difficulties.

Item	Skill	Mean Percent
A	Understanding lectures	62.50
B	Taking notes during lectures	60.00
C	Asking questions in the classroom	74.25
D	Answering questions in the classroom	50.75
E	Participating in the classroom discussion	67.50
F	Understanding textbook	74.63
G	Coping from Board/text	64.75
H	Writing answers to the questions	68.25

Item wise mean percentages as perceived by teachers with respect to students learning difficulties.



From the above table it is observed that, the teachers expressed the students find high difficulties with respect to asking questions in the classroom, understanding textbook, writing answers to the questions, participating in the classroom discussion. The mean percentages of the above are found be 74.63%, 74.25, 68.25, and 67.50% respectively.

In some areas, teachers expressed the students find above average difficulties with respect to making notes, understanding lectures, and taking notes during lecture. The mean percentages are found to be 64.75%, 62.50%, and 60% respectively.

It is clear from above table that teachers do consider that students face maximum difficulty in asking questions in the classroom and understanding textbook. However, the average value of all the learning difficulties shows that teachers believe their students face average difficulties in the above areas except making notes and understanding lecture. This further suggests that teachers feel their students need a little more improvement in all the areas.

Learning Difficulties (Student point of view)

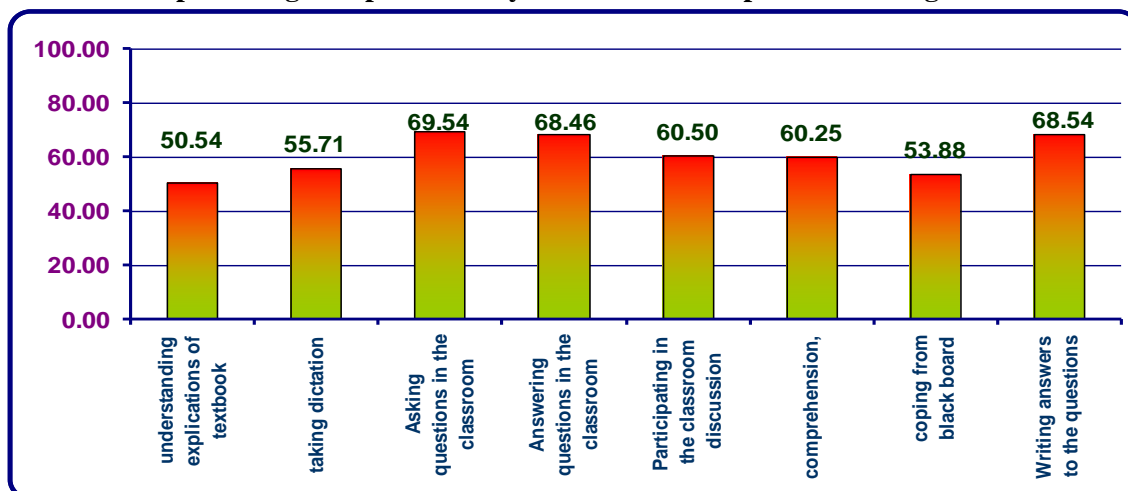
The focus of the questionnaire was to know about students' perceptions about their difficulties in learning and using English. Lists of nine possible difficulties were provided to the students, to name the list of the difficulties *understanding explications of textbook, taking dictation, asking questions in classroom, answering questions in the classroom, participating in the classroom discussion, comprehension, coping from black board and writing answers to the questions*. A four-point- Likert scale ranging from very difficult to very easy was used on which the students had to tick any one point against each difficulty and thus indicate the degree of difficulty. The points on the Likert scale are marked as Very easy being 1 and so on to Very difficulty being 4. The analysis of students' responses on these difficulties shows that each of them had ticked either Difficult or Easy as their responses since their average responses mean percent range from 50.54% to 68.54% on each of the difficulties listed out. The average values of the learners on each of the difficulties are summarized in the following table.

Item wise mean percentages as perceived by students with respect to learning difficulties.

Item	Learning difficulties	MeanPercent

A	understanding explications of textbook	50.54
B	taking dictation	55.71
C	Asking questions in the classroom	69.54
D	Answering questions in the classroom	68.46
E	Participating in the classroom discussion	60.50
F	comprehension,	60.25
G	coping from black board	53.88
H	Writing answers to the questions	68.54

Item wise mean percentages as perceived by students with respect to learning difficulties.



As per the table the highest perceptions were in respect of asking questions in the classroom and answering questions in the classroom. The other items recorded average to above average perceptions by the students. The least perception recorded is for understanding textbooks. The table expresses that majority of the students face difficulty in asking and answering to the questions in the classroom, participating in the classroom discussion and so on. Students perhaps nourish inhabitation in speaking with the teacher in English. Either they restrain themselves for speaking or prefer to use English minimally. Mother tongue is perhaps the preferred language spoken while teaching in such context.

Students' Learning Difficulties

Learning difficulties include specific difficulties related to the understanding language. It is evident from both teachers' and students' responses from the questionnaires, and classroom observation by the researcher. Majority of the students are of the opinion that however, much they try to overcome the difficulties the fear of mastering the language haunts them and this hurdle is coming on the way of learning how to contextualize the language acquired.

English is very difficult to most of the students because of the nature of the language, the inappropriate education system, lack of contextual support and the attitude and effort of the students, it is also necessary for them to varying degrees for practical, occupational, personal and academic reasons. Though students are afraid of learning English because of the nature of the language, and its status in the country, lack of opportunities to use the language, lack of their efforts and lack of teacher's help, most of them believe that they can learn it because they are conscious of their responsibility including their efforts, teacher's help, their liking for the subject, practicing with the people, help through tuition, listening to radio, TV, and E-sources.

Students' Language Needs

Students' language needs provide significant input for the development of their courses and teaching materials. Students' English language needs are found through many sources like questionnaires, interviews and classroom observation and field notes. The English language needs of the students include the areas of the four basic skills i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing.

To teach any second language the four language skills are important. Language skills are the main skills which will help the students to learn the targeted language. Teachers are of the opinion these skills would benefit the students. This could be the true from the point of view as a speaking skill which will benefit the students in communication with others, writing skill will help them in attending to project reports, assignments and writing examinations. However, all the four skills are essential and as one skill is associated with the other and all put together enhance the communicative competency of the learner. Some teachers opined that these skills can be developed through varied activities in the classroom, where in the student gets an opportunity to use these four skills, this kind of initiative is a proof of teachers' creativity which plays an important role in imparting right skills in appropriate context.

Different Learning Problems of Students

We have all had students in our classes who, perhaps we have thought of as difficult or slow because they don't keep up with the class or seem to be lazy and uninterested in whatever topic we cover. Then there are those who seem to be in another world, not paying attention to what's happening in the lesson, and the ones who just can't seem to focus for longer than a few minutes. As teachers we want all our students to be happy and learning to achieve their full potential. So what do we do about the 'difficult' students, the ones who aren't happy and learning? Well, more often than not we tend to not know what to do, because we've tried every trick to engage them that we learned on our teacher training courses, and none of them seem to be working.

We give up trying as there are other students in our lessons who are engaged and making progress and it's easier to focus on them. They're the good language learners...In this series of blog posts we will be looking at how to identify students who may be learning in a different way and need support to ensure that they are included in our classes. For this first article, I will be focusing on different types of learning differences – identifying what each of them is and how they can affect learning. There are a number of SpLDs such as Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, ADHD, Aspergers Syndrome and Dyscalculia which can affect learning. They all have similarities and differences and often co-occur.

Below is an outline of each one:

Dyslexia

This is a common developmental difference that is seen mainly in information processing, especially phonological processing – which is the system we use to process basic word sounds. Phonological awareness is a key skill in the development of reading and writing skills. People with dyslexia can also have problems with short term and working memory, verbal processing speed and co-occurring difficulties with organisation, sequencing, co-ordination and concentration. Dyslexia affects all kinds of people regardless of intelligence, race or social class. Causes are unknown; it can be hereditary and there is no cure, but there are many ways we can support our learners in the classroom.

Dyslexia manifests itself differently from person to person. Low self-esteem is often an issue because of not being able to keep up with the constant measuring of progress and testing. Often this behaviour is misinterpreted as not caring or being lazy as the learner becomes good at covering their inadequacies by displaying an uninterested, disengaged attitude.

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)

ADHD is a common developmental difference that affects those parts of the brain that control attention, impulses and concentration. Common symptoms are short attention span, restlessness and constant fidgeting and being impulsive. People with the condition lack the filters to ignore what is

going on around them resulting in a lack of focus. It can occur in people of all intellectual ability and is common in people with learning difficulties. Causes are unknown but it can be hereditary. Medication is often prescribed for ADHD but it also requires the right kind of educational support from teachers and parents. A student with ADHD can be identified as someone whose attention often wanders and is not with the other learners in class, the student who finds it difficult to stay on task or follow instructions and their answers may not be relevant to what is going on in class indicating that they may not be thinking reflectively on what is being done.

Dyspraxia

Dyspraxia is a common developmental difference affecting co-ordination, fine motor skills, articulation and sensory perception. People with dyspraxia lack attention and concentration and have difficulties with speech production. They are often very sensitive to the environment: temperature, light, noise etc, and it their affects spatial awareness. The causes are not fully known.

Dyspraxic learners often have difficulty with handwriting, with hand-to-eye coordination, difficulty in walking in a straight line, and are often bumping into things. They can also have a poor attention span and be easily distracted, do not cope well with change and have poor organisational skills, plus difficulty maintaining friendships and lacking awareness of appropriate behaviour.

Dyscalculia

Dyscalculia is a learning difference in mathematics. People with this condition have problems with memory and problem-solving. It is not an easily diagnosed condition as it often co-occurs with other learning differences such as dyslexia and ADHD. It is a neurological condition and can be hereditary. A learner with dyscalculia will have difficulty with counting and number sequences, telling the time or handling money. They may find map reading and directions difficult and problems differentiating between left and right.

Asperger's syndrome

Asperger's is part of the autism spectrum. Different from all of the above as it's not a problem with memory (in fact, people with this have very good memories). Difficulty with social interaction, difficulty with social imagination, difficulty with changes in routine, people with Asperger's syndrome often have very narrow and intense interests (perhaps in only one or two areas eg: computers, trains, dinosaurs, animals etc). A learner with Asperger's Syndrome will exhibit repetitive patterns of behaviour, more so than the average person. They may also have difficulties controlling these behaviours. Unlike Autism, Asperger's Syndrome does not affect the individual's language acquisition. A learner with Asperger's lacks understanding of social cues and subtleties, and find it difficult to engage in reciprocal conversation and to generalize and apply knowledge across different situations. They can have poor fine-motor skills, problem solving skills and organisational skills. In our next post we will be looking at how we can best support students with specific learning difficulties.

Conclusion

Students with learning difficulties are fairly common in schools. However, it is sensible that incidence of learning difficulties varies across schools and countries. The rate of incidence of difficulties related to learning can lie between 12 per cent and 30 per cent of the school population (Westwood, 2004). As the attribution of 'learning difficulty' (LD) is quiet high, literature describe such identification of difficulty as 'garden variety' learning difficulty (Badian, 1996). Confusing the situation, students labeled as learning difficult or disabled is of below average intellectual level, and often are from lower socio-economic and deprived backgrounds. This makes identifications of LDs even more complex in Indian context.

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