



## IDENTIFICATION OF LEARNING DISABILITIES

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### Abstract

This paper established that learning difficulty is a phenomenon that affects children and is a heterogeneous disorder, which poses difficulty in reading, writing and mathematical calculations. Learning Disorder as a 'Disorder' has started attaining considerable attention recently because of the felt need to ensure timely identification and intervention for the betterment of the present and future suffering of such children. For achieving this purpose, better understanding of every aspect of it is very essential for the teachers, as he/she has the responsibility towards such students being especially able children and it is necessary to guide and train them in proper direction. While highlighting the need and importance of early identification of the students with specific learning disorder, this paper will focus on the various tools and techniques for the screening of LD; national and international level programs and policies and school-based interventions that can facilitate the learning which can give wings to the dreams of such students. Teachers are to identify such disorder through the use of checklist, assessment, observation, use of tests and face to face interviews. The identified disorder include; Dyscalculia or math difficulty, Dyspraxia or motor planning difficulty and Attention Difficulty Disorder, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder.

**Keywords:** Learning Disabilities, Learning Identification, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder.

### Introduction

Learning difficulties is an umbrella term for academic problems of different origin. It comprises general learning deficits and low academic performance, e. g. in the context of disabilities as well as specific forms like reading, spelling and arithmetic disorders. As a consequence, many different denotations exist that try to differentiate between general and specific forms or point out the stability of the learning problem. The term learning disability usually highlights general and long-lasting learning difficulties, often linked to the field of special education. The term learning disorder characterizes learning problems in a specific field that contrast the general aptitude of the person. Apart from the classification in DSM-IV and ICD-10, there is no universally accepted terminology and the connotations of the technical terms even vary within the same language (f. e. between Great Britain and the U.S.). There are genetic and neurobiological correlates as well as cognitive, motivational, affective and socio-economic determinants of learning difficulties, some of which are easier modifiable (prior knowledge, motivation) than others (memory span, socio-economic background). The diagnosis and intervention has to address the individual problems of the affected person. The diagnostic distinction between general and specific learning problems is however subject to substantial criticism. Educational policies vary considerably between different educational systems: While some countries practice segregation of poor performing children and teenagers, there is currently a strong trend towards inclusive education, especially since the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

**Identification of specific learning disabilities:** The largest eligibility category covered within the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)—is a complex topic for a variety of etiological, psychological, and political reasons. As a result of this complexity, understandings of SLD, identification patterns, and procedures for determining students' eligibility for special education services vary widely (Etscheidt, 2013; Weintraub, 2005). In particular, the 2004 reauthorization of IDEA expanded SLD identification options to include "a process that determines if the child responds to scientific, research-based intervention" (§ 1414[b][6]), or what is most commonly known as response to intervention (RTI)<sup>2</sup>. Although the United States Congress intended this expansion to remedy problems with the traditional approach to identification that required presence of a severe discrepancy between IQ and achievement, the resulting implementation of RTI has created considerable uncertainty regarding how best to determine eligibility for special education services within the SLD category. This issue is problematic for SLD identification and eligibility determinations generally, and particularly in eligibility areas where scientific, research-based assessment and intervention options and access to trained staff are limited (Vaughn et al., 2010), such as in the areas of written language and oral expression and in secondary grades. In addition, requirements related to use of funds authorized by federal programs such as Title I, IDEA Part B, and Coordinated Early Intervening services (National Center on Response to Intervention [NCRTI], 2010b) can make it difficult for schools to leverage their resources to develop staff capacity to implement and sustain high-quality RTI systems that can reliably identify and support at-risk students, including those with SLD.

### How to identify child with Learning Difficulty

In order to identify children with learning difficulty, Denga (2009:34) posited the following methods.



## The Use of Checklists

The Schwab Foundation for Learning has a grade specific checklist to help identify “at risk for LD” children. This list is comprehensive and usually followed by organizations working in the field of LD (Schwab Learning, 2002).

The checklist for LD in the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan Manual (SSA, 2003) is also a helpful tool for initial screening by teachers in the schools. However, at present, the assessment itself is being used as a screening/identification procedure. The children are referred for assessment by the school/teacher for reasons of failure, underachievement or behavioral problems. For the same reasons, parents may take the child directly, and avail of examination concessions that exist in some states. In the rural areas, there is near zero awareness of LD and practically no assessment facilities.

**Observation:** Observation by teachers, counselors and special educators is very important initial activity. It is tied up with the checklist because a teacher or counselor can more confidentially check what he has observed rather depend on secondary source. If possible, visits can be paid to the parent’s home to find out what does at home. Observation calls for a team effort.

## Interview with the Child

“An Interview should be a conversation with a purpose” (Wallace, Larsen, & Elksnin, 1992, p. 16), with questions designed to collect information that “relates to the observed or suspected disability of the child”. (National Information Centre for Children and Youth with Disabilities, 2000).

A careful review of the student’s school records or work samples help the assessment team identify patterns or areas of specific concern which may be focused on at the time of interview. The student too, may have much to say to illuminate the problem (Hoy & Gregg, 1994, p. 44). (National Information Centre for Children and Youth with Disabilities, 2000).

## Testing

Though increasingly controversial, most identification for LD includes standardized tests. There are two types of tests.

- (i) **Criterion-referenced tests:** Scored according to a standard, or criterion decided by the teacher, the school, or the test publisher. An example of a criterion referenced test might be a teacher-made spelling test where there are 20 words to be spelled and where the teacher has defined an “acceptable level of mastery” as 16 correct (or 80%). (National Information Centre for Children and Youth with Disabilities, 2000).
- (ii) **Norm-referenced tests:** Scores on these tests are not interpreted according to an absolute standard or criterion (i.e., 8 out of 10 correct, etc.) but, on how the student’s performance compares with that of the norm group (a large number of representatives of that age group). This helps evaluators determine whether the child is performing at a typical level, below, or above that expected of a given ethnicity, socio-economic status, age, or grade. (National Information Centre for Children and Youth with Disabilities, 2000).

## Assessment

Before a specialized evaluation of a student is conducted, pre-referral discussions by teachers regarding the nature of the problem, and what possible modifications to instructions in the classroom might be made are important. The child must be assessed in all areas related to the suspected disability such as health, vision, hearing, social and emotional status, general intelligence, academic performance, communicative status, and motor abilities. An ideal assessment for LD is a long process requiring several sessions with a qualified educational psychologist. Apart from administering a battery of tests, the psychologist also gathers relevant information about the child from the teachers and school records.

## Parental Consent and Parent Interview

- Parents’ consent must be obtained before identified the child. The academic, developmental and medical history along with the linguistic usage and communications patterns of the child must be obtained from the parents.
- The parent must be involved in the planning of the intervention program such as attending a resource room, provision of accommodation and modifications to the child.

## Gathering Information from the Teachers/School

The psychologist must also observe the child in his/her school setting to know about the child’s performance and behavior in the class, and gain insights from the teacher. Review of previous grades will show the pattern of academic progress. These may throw light into the problem areas of the child. A student’s current classroom performance can be compared to Test scores.



### Looking at Student Workbooks

Regrettably, in the present educational set up, very often the notebooks don't reflect the learning difficulties faced by the child due to rote learning especially when the child can easily copy from the blackboard. The examination papers may give a clearer picture of the specific nature of difficulty. Dictation sample of same boy during assessment shows how the notebook may not reveal the difficulty. Only through collecting data through a variety of approaches (observations, interviews, tests, curriculum-based assessment, etc.) and from various sources such as parents, teachers, peers, adequate picture be obtained of the child's strengths and weaknesses. Synthesized, this information can be used to determine the specific nature of the child's needs. During the past few decades, the understanding of learning disability has changed. However, it is a tremendous challenge to identify and diagnose and assist children with learning disability. If proper identification and diagnosis is done remediation can be provided at the right time, children with LD can and do learn successfully and become winners in the society later.

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