

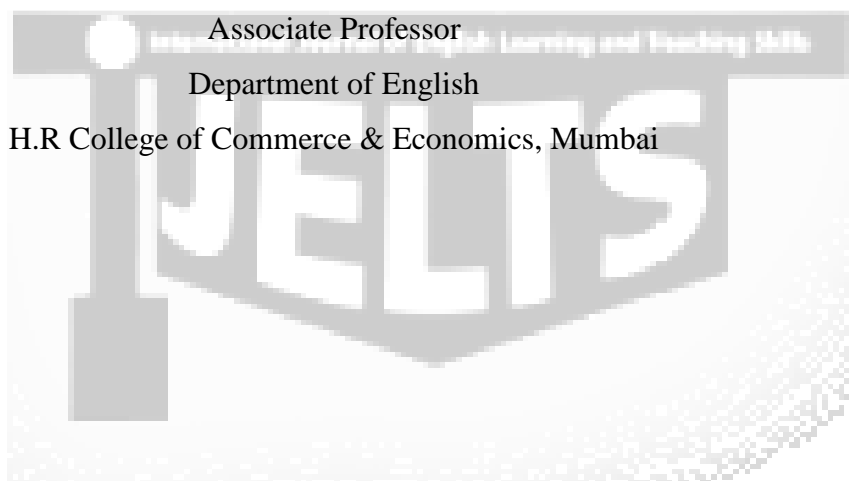
Enhancing the Reading Capabilities of Students with Learning Disabilities: Remedial Classroom Teaching & Learning Skills

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Abstract

For a receptive human being, learning is a ceaseless process. However, learning methods at school are relatively vigorous. There can be more than one aspect which creates an impediment to the learning processes. Therefore, coping with learning difficulties can be extremely stressful for a student. The methodology that the present paper follows is an analysis of various books on dyslexia with an intention to offer incisive insights which can be adopted by teachers in the classroom for managing the educational needs of a disabled student. After a general discussion on the term ‘learning disabilities,’ the paper attempts to understand dyslexia, its symptoms and some techniques which can be adopted by teachers in their remedial classes in order to enhance the reading skills in students with such disabilities. In simple language, the term ‘Dyslexia’ can be understood as a difficulty in reading. A dyslexic student is commonly mistaken as a slow learner. However, the paper attempts to discuss that dyslexic students are not slow learners and by implementing certain strategies and remedial programmes, a dyslexic student can effectively excel in academics. The paper circumspectly knits together ideas and techniques for building the reading skills of children with difficulties and provides pragmatic strategies for teachers as well as parents to help students in developing their reading skills. The conclusion of this paper offers some tips for improving the reading skills of dyslexic students. It emphasizes on the fact that if these easy and understandable reading techniques are faithfully taught by a teacher such techniques would prove to be an aid to facilitate disabled students to strengthen their reading skills. Also, through the bibliography of this paper, a list of resources has been created for those who may wish to seek further guidance or assistance in this area of research.

Key words: disabilities, dyslexia, reading skills, remedial classroom teaching, strategies.

Introduction

Every human being has the capacity to offer something distinctive to the world. However, hackneyed teaching and learning methods and evaluation patterns have displayed narrow perspectives on the idea of success. In present times the aptitude of a student is looked upon only in terms of the grades and marks; where as in reality the success of a student should be measured by the talent and skills that he/she possesses. Therefore it is the duty of teachers and parents to make sure that each child is treated exclusively and that the talent of every child is nurtured in a reassuring manner.

Learning is not an easy process. Many times, it is difficult for the student to cope up with one or more set patterns of learning which he/she is expected to master within the span of a

single academic year. Kleine & Webb (1993) state that a considerable percentage of school going children experience coping with the curriculum to be extremely difficult (Kleine & Webb, 1993). Therefore, education for a student appears to get overly complex and it is not quite common to see several children struggling to with the curriculum in an efficient manner. Most teaching institutes do not address or fail to recognize the actuality that different learners require different kinds of skills. It is therefore a mistake to think that a single teaching methodology would suffice the learning needs of all the students in the classroom.

Ronald Davis (1994), states that “‘Learning Difficulties’ are more popularly known as ‘Learning Disabilities’ the world over” (Davis 1994). Therefore, ‘difficulties’ which is the term that appears in the title of this paper is used as an alternative for the term ‘disability’ because the term ‘learning disability’ leads to negative connotations and implies that the fault lies with the child. However, both these words are used in the paper to describe the same crisis.

What is a Learning disability?

Kephart (2002) has defined a learning disability as, “A disorder manifested by difficulty in learning to read despite conventional instructions, adequate intelligence and socio-cultural opportunity. It is depended upon fundamental cognitive disabilities which are frequently of constitutional origin.” (Kephart 2002). David Sousa (2001) states, “A disability is a neurological disorder. It does not mean that the learner is an abnormal person. Rather, a learning disability simply refers to circuitry in the brain which is not just complex, but also weird. It is never 100% accurate” (Sousa, 2001). The statement means that the way a normal child can deal with different abilities like reading, writing, learning or -calculations, a disabled child is unable to do so due to a flawed wiring in the brain. Therefore, such a child is labeled as “disabled” by the society.

Why does a learning difficulty occur?

Kime and Waine (2005) have broadly classified two broad reasons for a human being to have a learning difficulty. The first reason is caused by innate characteristics, that is, what the child through the parent’s genes. The second reason can be attributed to certain circumstances like during pregnancy a mother being malnutrition, damage to the head at the time of birth or due to an accident; over dosage of drugs and medicines etc. (Kime and Waine, 2005).

Dyslexia- A Difficulty in Reading

A common and popularly known learning disability is dyslexia. It is basically a difficulty in reading. Dyslexic students display extensive traits. Some of the problems that such students face are in the areas of reading, comprehension, mathematical abilities, written as well as spoken language and logical thinking skills. Sally Shaywitz (2005) says, “A cause of concern arises when a significant cluster of symptoms is seen and when it affects daily living” (Shaywitz (2005)). A frequent mistake made by society is to label dyslexic students as slow learners. However, Baum (1990) states, “Dyslectic students aren’t dumb nor are they slow learners. This is because slow learners have below average intelligence while dyslexic students cannot be categorized as slow learners. (Baum 1990). Along with other difficulties, dyslexic students exhibit a prominent struggle in reading skills. Since reading skills dominate a student’s life much beyond academics, it is of prime importance to work on improving their reading skills. Therefore, reading skills to dyslexic students should be the primary responsibility of teachers teaching and training processes imparted to students in the classroom.

Brock (2012) has identified reading difficulties which indicate through multifarious expression. Some of them can be enlisted as follows:

1. Reading each word

In the pursuit of reading, the student’s excessive involvement in reading each word makes it almost difficult to comprehend what he reads. Due to the over involvement in reading each word, the student does not pause when there are punctuations or use intonation.

2. Abject pronunciation

While reading aloud the student mispronounces words. One of the reason for this the problem of reversal e.g. ‘dot’ and ‘tod’, inversions e.g. ‘form’ as ‘from,’ or due to faulty sequences of syllables e.g. ‘animal’ as ‘aminal’.

3. Replacements

This involves the usage of a more friendly word rather than using the one that has been printed in the book e.g. ‘food’ for ‘supper.’

4. Hassle in maintaining the accurate place on the reading line

This difficulty involves missing out words or a complete line while reading. It mainly results from the distraction that the student faces while reading a text.

5. Difficulty in switching from one end of the line to the beginning of the next one

Due to distraction while reading, the student comes back to the text and misses a line or two in between.

6. Lack of understanding of sight words

Sight words are words which are frequently used in the English language. If the student is not familiar with these words, there could be a difficulty faced while reading. Some examples of sight words include words like what, who, could, there etc.

7. Either an unnecessary insertion or deletion of letters

This happens when he's' at the end of the word is not read out or unnecessarily the student adds 'ed' at the end. E.g. reading out 'ask' instead of 'asks' or 'asked.'

8. A hindrance that arises either due to inclusion or deletion of words

This problem arises when the student out of habit inserts or deletes words which are not there in the reading material.

Remedial techniques for teaching and strengthening reading skills of Dyslexic students

After identifying the difficulties in reading that dyslexic students encounter, it is important to discuss remedial techniques which can be adopted by teachers in the classroom. The same techniques can be incorporated by parents while contributing towards acquiring reading skills at home. The Indi-Canadian psychologist J.P. Das (2008) has suggested some methods and techniques that would help in developing the reading skills of a disabled students. They are as are as follows:

1. Twin reading technique

The teacher and the student sit beside each other with the reading material between them. Before asking the student to read, the teacher familiarizes the student with the background of what he is about to read as well as discusses the meanings of unfamiliar words. The teacher as well as the student can begin reading aloud simultaneously but slowly. This method enables the student to comprehend what is being read. Simultaneous reading of the student as well as the teacher acts like a support for the student. Over a period of time, the student is encouraged to read on his own.

2. Use of finger/ruler to keep place

This technique is particularly useful for students who lose place and as a result miss out a line during the reading activity. The use of the finger while reading proves to be extremely constructive in keeping place. It eases the fear in the student to miss the correct place while reading enables him to focus on the other reading aspects.

3. Exercises for controlling reflexes while reading

This exercise is associated with strengthening the speech muscles of the student which in turn helps in improving their reading skills. Due to a lack of control on the speech muscles, a student ends up mispronouncing words. The student can be given exercises to build up the speech muscles which in turn would strengthen their reading skills.

4. Noncognitive visual exercises

These exercises help the student in overcoming difficulties in visual understandings while reading. This could be achieved by making students pick the right words from a maze. For example for 'was' by giving the options of words like- saw, wsa, aws & was. Making the student solve jigsaw word puzzles is another effective exercise that can done in remedial classrooms.

5. Multisensory activities

Such activities make use of multiple sensory channels to strengthen reading techniques. Some of these techniques involve:

- a. The VAKAT Method is the Visual, Auditory, Kinesthetic, Tactile method of teaching reading skills which makes use of tangible classroom activities that involve more than one sensory organ of the student. The activities involved in the VAKAT method consist of paintings, drawings, pictures, food, music, comparison of new concepts to personal experience and/or prior knowledge that the student has about a particular topic.
- b. Another multisensory exercise to help the student in recognizing alphabets while reading is making use of sandpaper letters in the classroom. In this technique, the teacher can make use of sandpaper cut outs of lower-case alphabets. The stony side of the sandpaper is placed upward. Each frequently confused alphabet e.g. 'b' and 'd' is painted in a different color. While reading out the alphabets, the student touches each alphabet and reads it aloud. This technique proves to be remarkably amplifying in improving the reading skills of the child because it makes use of the senses of touch, sight and hearing.

6. Tracking

Tracking is an essential skill required for improving the reading kills of a student. It is a technique which enables the eye movement of the student to be balanced and fast. This technique helps a student to read comfortably and grasp what is being read.

Conclusion

Dyslexia is a learning disability; however, it is not a disease. Hence, there is no cure for this condition. The condition can be juxtaposed to wearing spectacles due to some defect in vision. People wear spectacles due to short sightedness due to which reading from a book becomes almost impossible without wearing spectacles. Once the spectacles are worn, the problem is solved. Similarly, a corrective action for a dyslexic student involves remedial treatment and strategies that can be adopted by parents at home and teachers in the classroom to assist the student in learning. By adopting strategies in effectively dealing with this condition, a dyslexic student can excel in academics.

Ellis (1993) suggests, “Remedial strategies for a dyslexic student involve conceptual understanding while repetitive learning forms the crux of the remedial programme for slow learners” (Ellis 1993). Besides the specific techniques discussed earlier in the paper, there are some other tips that a teacher can incorporate in the classroom for enabling a disabled student to read. These techniques include familiarizing the student with the matter that’s being read, encouraging slow reading, allowing the student to read shorter passages rather than reading long passage which can be exhausting and rectifying the students’ mistakes only when a student completes the reading assignment. Lastly, do not insist on voice modulation, intonation and expression while reading as these are supplementary reading skills which can put an additional burden on the student.

To conclude, I would like to reiterate what Stephen (1997) says about the intelligence levels of disabled students who lack reading skills, “Students who are differently abled usually have intelligence levels that are either normal or very often above normal, yet their reading skills would lead parents and teachers to believe that they are slow, lazy or stupid” (Stephens, 1997). To support Stephens argument Web, Meckstroth & Tolan (1902) say, “Neither are these children slackers not are they lazy. They are poor performers in spite of the desire to work hard and in spite of having the requisite intelligence levels. Such students may simply have abilities that are different from most other children” (Web, Meckstroth & Tolan, 1982). Therefore, the contribution of parents and teachers towards a child with learning disabilities speaks volumes about the human spirit that the child can exhibit and shows that nothing is impossible if a proper guidance and encouragement is extended towards the child. With a proper direction, assistance and teaching aids, each child with a disability can hope to resolve and conquer any educational barrier that comes his way. With the help of the proper intervention of the teacher, ideal environment, remedial and inclusive teaching methods, children with difficulties can be assisted to enhance their reading skills. An informed teacher and a responsive parent can together provide a solid foundation for blossoming the growth of a disabled child.

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