

Difficulties in Identifying the Dyslexics in Multilingual Context

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ABSTRACT: The article explores the problems faced by the Professionals in identifying the dyslexic students in the multilingual context. Several studies revealed that there is a lack of awareness on Dyslexia among Teachers and Parents. Appropriate standardized tools in different languages are less in India to identify the dyslexics. Teachers are the Professionals who can identify the students with dyslexia in the earlier stage of education and provides appropriate interventions in the initial stage. This paper highlights the major difficulties encountered by the experts in identifying the dyslexics and providing appropriate educational accommodations to these students. The researchers of the present study have adopted the interview and observation technique to find out the difficulties encountered by the mainstream teachers, special teachers and psychiatrists to identify dyslexic students studying in the government school of Puducherry where the medium of instruction is Tamil and English.

KEYWORDS : Dyslexia, Identification, Issues, Multilingual, and Perspectives

I. INTRODUCTION

Dyslexia is one of the Specific Learning Disabilities (SpLD) which is commonly referred as specific Reading Disability. The term “dyslexia” was coined by Rudolf Berlin of Stuttgart Germany in 1887 (Wagner, 1973). He used the word to describe that the students encountered difficulties in reading the words and letters. The word dyslexia is derived from the Greek words “dys” and “lexis” which means “difficulty with words or language”. Dyslexia is not a disease, it is a kind of disability which affects a person's ability to read, spell and understand language that he/she hears, or express himself/herself clearly while speaking or in writing. Dyslexia is a syndrome which affects the language processing area of an individual which will lead to difficulties in acquiring the language skills such as reading, spelling and writing.

In the multilingual context, India, the Specific Learning Disabilities (SpLD) still remain as an unrecognized category (Karanth, 1998). The Persons with Disabilities Act (PWD), 1995 is the most important piece of legislation enacted in the history of disability movement in India. For the first time in India, it was clearly stated that people with disabilities had the right to equal opportunities and to fully participate as citizens of the country and that these rights would be protected by the law (Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, 2006). The PWD Act recognizes only the seven disabilities viz. Blindness, Low Vision, Leprosy – cured, Hearing impairment, Locomotor Disability, Mental Retardation and Mental Illness. The category Learning Disability is not included in the most important Disability Law in India. Maharashtra was the first State in India to recognize Specific Learning Disability and grant accommodations to students of Class X in 1996. In 2011, the Government of India has taken initiative steps to include various mental disabilities, intellectual disabilities and the hidden disabilities like dyslexia. The Rights of the Persons with Disabilities Bill 2014, has recognized the nineteen types of various disabilities and included in the draft Bill namely: autism; low vision and blindness; cerebral palsy; deaf blindness; haemophilia; hearing impairment; leprosy; intellectual disability; mental illness; muscular dystrophy; multiple sclerosis; learning disability; speech and language disability; sickle cell disease; thalassemia; chronic neurological conditions; and multiple disability (The Draft Rights of Persons with Disabilities Bill, 2012).

Persons with benchmark disabilities are defined as those with at least 40 per cent of any of the above specified disabilities (The Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995). Specific Learning disabilities is one of the disabilities which have got its recognition in the Bill. Still the Bill remains as a Bill and does not turn into an Act. In the Schedule, the Rights of the Persons with Disabilities Bill 2014, Government of India, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Department of Disability Affairs: the term Specific Learning disabilities has been defined as “a heterogeneous group of conditions wherein there is a deficit in processing language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself as a difficulty to comprehend, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations and includes such conditions as perceptual disabilities, dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia, dyspraxia and developmental aphasia” (The Draft Rights of Persons with Disabilities Bill, 2012).

The definition stated in the Rights of the Persons with Disabilities Bill 2014 for the Specific Learning disabilities has not given clear cut specific definition for the terms such as perceptual disabilities, dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia, dyspraxia and developmental aphasia. This will lead to problems in identifying the students who are afflicted with these disabilities due to the lack of proper definition for these disabilities. Specific Learning disabilities is a heterogeneous disabilities, there is no single universally accepted definition for the terms Specific Learning disabilities and Dyslexia. The definition adopted for these terms differs from countries to countries (Ministry of Education – New Zealand, 2006).

In India, We do not know the exact statistical details about the persons affected by Specific Learning Disabilities, this is due to the multi- lingual system, lack of standardized tools available in different languages to assess Learning Disabilities, lack of trained man power to screen for Learning Disabilities and more over it is not visible like other disability categories (Karande, Sunil; Sholapurwala , Rukhshana& Kulkarni, Madhuri (2011). They stated that the difficulties in identify the Specific Learning Disabilities are due to the “non-availability of standardized psychological and educational tests”. From the literature it is found that approximately 10-14% of the 416 million children in India have SpLD (Krishnan, 2007; Krishnakumar, 1999; Mehta, 2003). Researches carried out in the various states of India state that in an every average-sized class atleast five students were likely to have the Specific Learning Disability (Thomas, Bhanutej, & John, 2003).

Dyslexia in the Multilingual Context: India : Dyslexia is one of the most common SpLDs (Specific Learning Disabilities), affecting 80% of all those identified as Specific Learning Disabled in India (Karande, Sawant, Kulkarni, Galvankar, &Sholapurwala, 2005, p. 96). The definition for the term dyslexia still remains as a controversial issue in the different countries of the world. Dyslexia is perceived in many ways because of there is no single universally accepted definition of the term dyslexia. The literature review in the field reveals the variety of definitions prevail for the single term dyslexia. The term Specific Reading Disability, Reading Disorder, Reading Disability, Reading Disorder and Specific Reading Difficulty are often interchangeably used for dyslexia (Vellutino FR, Fletcher JM, Snowling MJ, Scanlon DM, 2004). In 1968, the World Federation of Neurologypublished a definition which was recommended by the Research Group of Developmental Dyslexia reads as: "A disorder manifested by a difficulty in learning to read despite conventional instruction, adequate intelligence and socio-cultural opportunity. It is dependent upon fundamental cognitive difficulties which are frequently of a constitutional character."

The definition of Task Force on Dyslexia, 2001 reads as follow: "Dyslexia is manifested in a continuum of specific learning difficulties related to the acquisition of basic skills in reading, spelling, and/or writing, such difficulties being unexpected in relation to an individual's other abilities and educational experiences. Dyslexia can be described at the neurological, cognitive and behavioural levels. It is typically characterised by inefficient information processing, including difficulties in phonological processing, working memory, rapid naming, and automaticity of basic skills. Difficulties in organisation, sequencing and motor skills may also be present. (Task Force on Dyslexia, 2001, p. 28) The International Dyslexia Association (IDA) definition reads as follows: "Dyslexia is a specific learning disability that is neurological in origin. It is characterized by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. These difficulties typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language that is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction. Secondary consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede the growth of vocabulary and background knowledge." (Adopted by the Board of Directors: November 12, 2002)

The British Dyslexia Association (BDA) definition reads as follow: "Dyslexia is a specific learning difficulty which mainly affects the development of literacy and language related skills. It is likely to be present at birth and to be lifelong in its effects. It is characterised by difficulties with phonological processing, rapid naming, working memory, processing speed, and the automatic development of skills that may not match up to an individual's other cognitive abilities. It tends to be resistant to conventional teaching methods, but its effects can be mitigated by appropriately specific intervention, including the application of information technology and supportive counselling." (BDA, 2008) In India, the definition stated by the International Dyslexia Association (IDA) for the term dyslexia has been widely adopted by the researchers, psychiatrist, physician, academicians and parents because the state Maharastra is the first state in India which recognized specific learning disabilities and Maharastra Dyslexia Association has collaboration with IDA. (Fernando, Jill &McCarney, Dee 2012).

Symptoms of Dyslexia : The signs and symptoms of dyslexia differ from individuals to individuals but the most common symptoms of dyslexia has been listed by the various dyslexia and specific learning disabilities

organizations and authors are listed below (International Dyslexia Association ; British Psychological Society, 1999; British Dyslexia Association, 2005; Maharashtra Dyslexia Association 1996; Davis & Braun, 1994; Torgesen, J. K. 1998; Snowling, M. J. 2000) :

- Has difficulty in learning to read
- Confuses with similar looking letters (b as d, m as w)
- Mispronounces the words while reading
- Skips the words while reading loudly
- Confuses similar-looking words (e.g., beard/bread)
- Lacks consistency in reading words
- Omits prefixes or suffixes of words while reading
- Reading level is below the grade level
- Reversals in the reading of letters such as n for u, p for q, d for b and also monosyllabic word reversals such as know for on, was for saw.
- Omissions and additions of words in oral sentence reading.
- Excessive slowness in reading
- Poor retention of material that has been read
- Difficulty with spontaneous writing and writing to dictation
- Has problems in associating letter with sounds
- Finds difficulty to blend the sounds into words
- Has inadequate phonological awareness
- Has difficulty in reading the charts in a sequential order
- Academic performance is below than the grade level

Problems in Identifying Dyslexic in Multilingual Context : It is a paramount need to identify dyslexic students in the earlier stage itself in order to provide appropriate interventions and accommodations to overcome these Specific Reading Disabilities and avail provisions offered by the various educational boards of India. India is a multilingual country: identify dyslexic students in this context is a difficult task for the experts. The reason for this adverse condition is due to lack of availability of standardized tools in different languages to identify dyslexic: “these provisions are not yet available to many children with SpLD in our country; and especially to those who are studying in vernacular medium schools, for non-availability of standardized psychological and educational tests” (Karande S, Kulkarni, 2005). India follows three language systems and the medium of instruction differs from school to school and states to states.

In the Indian context, one single tool will not suffice to solve the problem of identifying the dyslexic students. There is a dearth of tests to identify the dyslexics; the cause for the prevailing condition is due to the lack of awareness among various categories of people. There is still a general lack of awareness about SpLD in a large majority of Indian schools (Karande. S, 2008; Kamala, R. Ramganesh, E (2013). In our country, many classroom teachers in regular mainstream schools have limited knowledge of SpLD (Karande. S, 2008; Saravanabhavan. S, Saravanabhavan. RC, 2010. One of the main barriers encountered by students with SpLD is the teacher’s lack of knowledge about their disability and about the rationale of provisions (Karande. S, Mahajan. V, Kulkarni. M, 2009). Inadequate knowledge leads to negative attitudes toward persons with disabilities (Saravanabhavan. S, Saravanabhavan. RC, 2001).

In this way the researchers attempted to find out the certain difficulties encountered by the experts in identifying the dyslexics in India and providing appropriate accommodations to these students in Indian context: What are the problems faced by the experts in the field of dyslexia in identifying the dyslexic students? This key question led to two other points of discussion: what are the tools available to identify the dyslexic students in India? and what are the problems to provide appropriate intervention and classroom accommodations to the dyslexic students? To seek the answer for these questions, the researchers adopted the focus group interview technique to find out the difficulties in identify dyslexic students studying in the government school of Puducherry where the medium of instruction is Tamil language and English is taught as one of the language subjects. The subjects for the focus group interview consist of three general classroom teachers, one special teacher and one psychiatrist. The experts in the study were all asked to explain their understanding of dyslexia. This question was supplemented by a further question asking whether they thought there was a difference between dyslexic and non-dyslexic poor readers. One of the researchers gave a brief introduction about the discussion and then they were asked to discuss about the topic. There discussion was recorded and the transcript

was subjected to the qualitative analysis through subdividing into different codes and themes. The subjects' responses for the issue are listed below:

- Lack of availability of standardized tests in the vernacular language
- Lack of intensive in-service training to identify the dyslexics
- Symptoms various from individual to individual
- Lack of awareness and cooperation from the parents
- Lack of availability of resources
- Interference of socio economic status and cultural background of the students
- Problems in differentiating the dyslexics from the poor readers
- Lack of availability of resource room
- Getting a disability certificate for dyslexia from the concern authority is a difficult task due to lack of proper definition and tool
- Dyslexia is a hidden disability, to identify this the concern authority should have a professional training
- Lack of availability of professionally trained persons to identify dyslexics
- Single remedial teaching does not fix for all dyslexic students
- Severity of the disability varies from individual to individual (Mild, Moderate and Severe Dyslexics, and At Risk of Dyslexia)
- Lack of adequate intensive intervention to the dyslexics
- Lack of use of appropriate teaching methodologies adopted by the teachers to teach the dyslexics in the mainstream education.

II. CONCLUSION

Different languages have different characteristics and different demands. Depending on the language, dyslexia will manifest itself in different ways and will be more or less easy to identify. In the case of students with a multilingual background, things tend to get more complicated. There are behaviours that are generally attributed to the dyslexia, but that may simply be the consequence of the pupil's socio-cultural background, lack of adequate learning opportunities or of inadequate teaching methodologies. For these reasons, it is very important for the teacher to be able to observe their students and to understand whether intervention might be needed or not. It is important to try to distinguish between difficulties that could be attributed to the dyslexia and those that are related to insufficient linguistic competence. The teacher needs to know what kind of information should be gathered and what kind of questions need to be asked about their students and their families before deciding to investigate the possibility of the dyslexia. Once the information is collected, it is important for the language teachers to communicate, exchange ideas and discuss together, in order to dig deeper and obtain a more thorough understanding of their student's difficulties. In the case where the information gathered by the teacher leads them to suspect the presence of dyslexia then the student need to be sent to further diagnosis. The solution available for the problem to identify dyslexic lies in the hands of the teachers, parents and psychiatrists making use of intensive observation of the student's performance in all areas including the academic and non academic areas and working as a team to identify the cause of the failure in academic areas and identifying and differentiating the dyslexics from the poor readers.

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