Catalysing Learning in Learning Disabled Adolescents

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Abstract

The purpose of present study was to explore the pedagogical practices in facilitating learning in learning disabled adolescents. It was conducted with 20 participants involved in the education of learning disabled.These included special educators, general educators teaching learning disabled adolescents, parents of learning-disabled adolescents and adolescent students dealing with this chalenge. The study provides a panoramic view of the effective teaching practices to address the needs of learning disabled in an inclusive classroom. Interview method was used for data collection. Open ended questions directed the interview into discussion on best practices followed by them in the process of teaching while addressing the diversity in the classroom.The findings were broadly suggestive of multi-sensory teaching, task analysis, need-based accommodation, graded level of difficulty, good rapport, direct declaration of content and questions, psychological security, parental collaboration, strengthening life-skills, regular repetition and reinforcement, clear and short instructions.

Keywords: *learning disabled, adolescents, inclusive classroom, best practices, life- skills, pedagogies*

Introduction:

The question 'what works best' has often baffled educators, parents and students dealing with Learning Disabilities It's much-varied manifestations has always intrigued researchers and educators to know beyond the known.Understandably, the neurological make up of Learning Disabled causes differences in stimulation patterns, appraisal of the condition , needs, challenges and strengths. The study aimed to collate the best pedagogical practices to enhance learning in learning disabled adolescents and provide a panoramic view of this process. Including learning-disabled in the regular classroom is not just a matter of child rights but is also under the surveillance of legal framework(RPWD,2016). Stereotypical teaching learning has morphed in to a dynamic process catering to all learners. The basic element of controversy and disagreement of teaching practices include the heterogenetic nature of learning disability. The significant discrepancy in learning potential and academic performance (Thapa,K,2008) gives rise to diversity in the teaching practices of the learning disabled. Majority of students diagnosed as learning disabled are not intrinsically disabled, but lack of educational opportunity and limited educational resources highlight their disability. Karnath

(2003) has also documented that the environmental factors are associated with Learning disability. Classroom ecology is greatly instrumental in teaching-learning process. Multiple domains of development i.e. cognitive, social, psychological and physiological, contribute to their learning. Teaching can be made effective when all said domains are taken into consideration.There's a gap in learning disabled's performance and self-expectation but there's another gap existent in performance of the student and expectation of the teacher.This gap can be bridged by formulations of realistic and achievable objectives based on their needs and challenges. The complexities are further complicated by an acute lack of teaching resources, teacher awareness and indigenous teaching strategies (Karanth, 1998). General educators must work closely with the resource teachers and be sensitised to the learning styles of the learners (NIMH,2003) Short, clear and goal-oriented objectives bridge the gap in performance and expectation to a great extent. World Health Organisation has emphasized on strengthening life-skills in students. These psychosocial competencies enable students to cope better with their environment.(WHO,1994) The age and the challenge both make students vulnerable, disposing them to environmental

threats. Depression stress and other psychological morbidities are seen in children with learning-disabilities. Social skills deficit(Accariya, 2016) are observed in them. If life-skills are strengthened, they are likely to have a better, stable and lasting learning outcome.Well delivered life skills can help children become more responsible and resilient individuals. (WHO,1994). Psychological readiness is equally important as biological readiness when learning is concerned. In addition to academic strengthening in a diverse group, psychosocial dimensions hold an important place in their education.

Method:

The present study is crafted in exploratory design.It has used interview technique with purposive sample of 20, inclusive of special educators, general educators, parents of learning-adolescents and adolescent students dealing with this challenge. They were led by open ended questions leading a probe into their perspective, practices and contribution to the education of learning-disabled in an inclusive classroom. The results were collated, and major pedagogies in inclusive classroom were broadly formulated by content analysis.Data were then putto statistical analysis to at a in results.
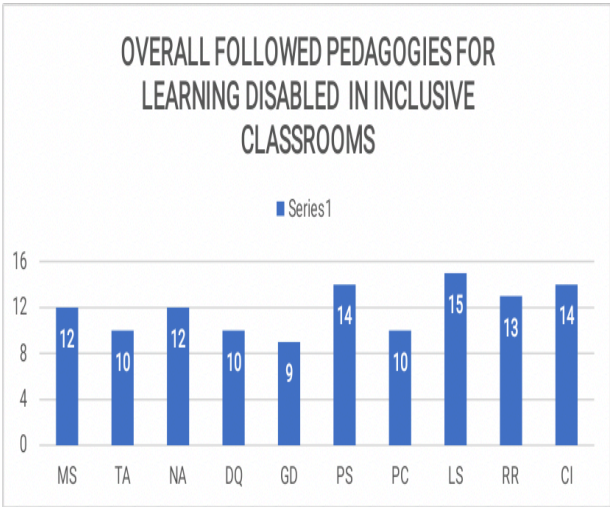
Results:

The findings were indicative of broadly ten pedagogies to address the diversity in learning abilities, viz: Multi-sensory teaching (MS), task analysis (TA), need-based accommodation (NA), direct declaration of questions(DQ), graded level of difficulty (GD), psychological security(PS), parental collaboration (PC), strengthening life-skills (LS), regular repetition and reinforcement(RR), clear and short instructions

(CI). Most of the special and general educators emphasized on the strengthening of life-skills (75%) and providing psychological security(70%)in the class.They felt that if they are mentally strong and secure, they can receive teaching and other instructions better. Non-threatening environment facilitates positive reinforcement. 70% feel that giving short and clear instructions adds to their learning.65% of the sample feels that repetition and regular reinforcement of the content helps in retention and recall of the subject matter. 60% of the sample feels that their use of smart boards, audio-visual techniques or multi-sensory teaching caters to a learning styles of the learners and i
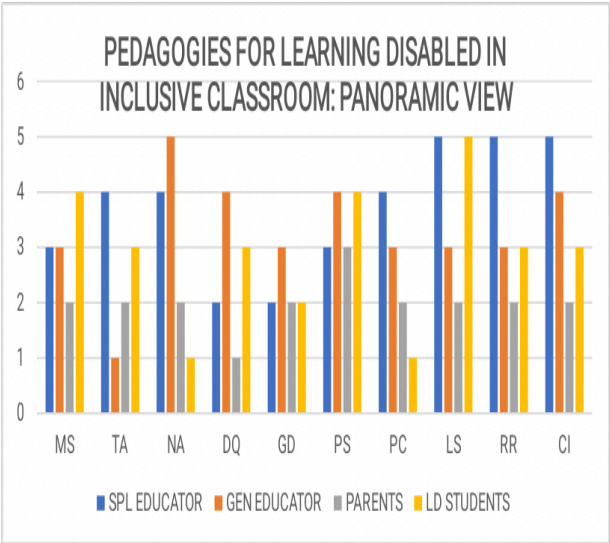
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there for every effective in teaching them. Also, providing need-based accommodations like extra tim e, scribe, ignoring spelling and other minor lexical errors, prompting, figural and visual substitutions, bilingual teaching, etc, are beneficial fort hem. 50% of the sample feels that direct declaration of concepts, questions and parental collaboration is instrumental in bringing a change in their understanding. 45% of the sample considers graded level of difficulty helps in maintain motivation while working and is therefore effective in their learning process.

Discussion:

Teaching-learning process in an inclusive classroom is highly dynamic in nature.The give and take information, the exchange of ideas makes it creative and a two-way learning process.This era is over flowing with the digital information. Students have access to information in virtual classrooms, yet there is a need to be in a real classroom with real teachers and real students. A physical classroom needs to be a non-threatening place where students learn and

grow full potential. A child is inherited with a biological capability to learn. To unlock potentials and nurture the nature, one needs facilitators, educators and other human and non-human resources. assessment. Since curriculum based academic performance is the basis for assessment, a teacher who is knowledgeable about it should therefore be, a part of the diagnostic team.'(Jena,2013). It is encouraging to see that general educators are aware and accommodative of the differences and are trying to foster effective and lasting learning. Their collaboration with the special educators helps in settling students with learning challenges in a regular class. More indigenous practices in the backdrop of cultural and environment impact learning in both learning disabled and non-learning-disabled students. Strategies effective for learning disabled work out equally beneficial to non-learning disabled also. Appreciation and encouragement coming from teachers and authoritative elders are a leverage to learning process. Cognizance of their strengths and challenges, adds to the positive impact on the entire matrix of their development. Acceptance, belief and commitment, ABC, as I call them are the keynote to catalyse learning with internalised and lasting outcomes. The results talk of the following ten strategies that were found beneficial by the sample to accommodate students with learning challenges in a regular class and foster learning in them at secondary level.

Multi sensory teaching (MS): With the digitalisation booming, use of smart boards, teaching applications and virtual lectures have become a part of teaching and learning. Teachers are more like facilitators and are adding to the learning skills of the students rather than remaining the sole source of information. Also, the multiple sensory stimulation adds much to the experience and process of learning. Stereotypical lecture method has been replaced with interactive and formative sessions with students where the learning is both ended.Each student with individual needs is a source of learning for the teacher. One needs to evolve with diverse needs of the learners. In the context of the findings of this research, general and special educators both recommend the use of m ulti-sensory teaching as it stimulates all senses and addresses the needs of students with different learning styles.Students with learning issues learn better if it is in figural and visual

form. This helps the learners as well. Students with learning challenges also felt that multi-sensory teaching is interesting and explains things much better. Either a practical demonstration or a virtual demonstration is a great way to understand the concepts. Virtual lectures can be repeated and recorded. This helps students to understand them in effective way and at their pace.

Task analysis (TA): It refers to breaking down a task in to segments and gradually proceeding with accomplishment of a segment. This helps students when they are notable to effectively process multiple instruction or complexity of the question. Most Special educators recommend this technique which is seconded by only 20% of general educators. This is an effective technique but is time consuming. Given to the constraints of time in a regular class, task analysis can bed one only for a few topics as shared by the general educators. Another constraint in task analysis is management of the students who have understood the concept start getting impatient. The course completion demands with the increased syllabi in secondary school level makes it difficult to use task analysis by the general educators. Students felt if the task is divided into smaller chunks, they are better able to manage it.They learnt better by this method.

Need based Accommodation (NA): These refer to certain adaptive changes and provisions in the environment and curriculum to accommodate the needs of the learners.These are recommended by the education board considering their difficulties a n d h a v e a legal foundation under R P W D act 2016. Extra time , scribe,   special exam centre, subject substitution, more weightage to practical components, re-arrangement of their seating etc. Certain other accommodations include use of bilingual method of explanation, individual attention, permitting shadow teachers etc. These were given to all students with learning challenges and were seconded by most special and general teachers. Parents felt that accommodations provided by the board are helpful and encouraging. Students however felt that accommodations may not be needed , and they are comfortable being taught like others. Special accommodations make them feel singled out and highlighted their challenges. Direct questions (DQ): Putting up direct questions help students understand them beter. The objective to monitor and check their progress and

comprehension of the subject maters is achieved to a greater extent by putting direct questions. Special educators and General educators felt that this method when used throughout the term, makes them correlate the underlying meaning and feel equipped to decipher the meaning of the question. In addition to this, they have the provision of having the question read out. So, it is useful when used consistently as it prepares them for indirect questions also.One of the educators added that before the exams, they put up indirect questions and ask them to formulate a direct question for the same.They are given a lot of practice in understanding the questions so that they are able to breakdown the question and decipher its meaning.This is a time-consuming method, but it helps a lot in empowering them and making them confident to take exams. Students also found this technique to be effective. Parents did not use this method much. They only reinforced the work done in the school. Only 20% of the parents found this technique effective while they were teaching their children with learning challenges.

Graded level of difficulty (GD):In this technique, students are given simple, manageable questions first and gradually difficulty level is increased to match the requirement for expected level. This helps them to complete task at hand, keep motivated to try and not feel frustrated while attempting to answer. It further helps them to sustain their attention and keep momentum of the work. This technique needs to be used consistently while planning assignments throughout the term . Some of the Special educators , general educators and students find this to be effective but not most of them use of this method.

PsychologicalSecurity(PS): Most special educators, general educators, parents and students feel that psychological security is one of the most important requisites to any individual's learning. If a child feels emotionally comfortable in the school and classroom environment, it potentiates and accelerates learning to a large extent, in contrast to a child who feels vulnerable to rejection and humiliation.Within classroom counselling, while generalising the concern, helps. The child feels confident to share the difficulties and stronger to cope with the realisation that others too go through certain concerns. Going to a counsellor doesn't seem feasible or even helpful most of the times due to

other pre-occupations of theirs in the school. However, for serious concerns, the counsellor is approached. Once the students feel psychologically secure, the teaching-learning process becomes comfortable. The only thing that a teacher needs to give student is 'time' that is apparently so time tabled.Psychologicalsecurityholdsupanimportant placeinlearningofalllearners, including learning disabled, and hence holds a high weightage in effective pedagogies for them.

Parents collaboration (P C): Collaboration with parents is important for effective learning in learning-disabled students. Parents as facilitators help in accelerating learning. Special educators and general educators feel that keeping parents in loop of learning maintains harmony in the strategies and makes the process more understandable both ended. They are shared the strategies of teaching so that they can help the child and have correct expectations out of a task.This keeps them from frustration as well as helps the student. Students however feel that they can manage their school work with the help of their teachers and involvement of parent say not be always helpful. Only 20% of them feel that parents' involvement is helpful in learning.

Life -skills (L S): Life -skills education hold up the highest weightage in teaching learning process. All students had the same view about this. These are the psychosocial abilities that help an individual to adapt to the environment in a positive manner. These are empowering facilities if instilled, makes an individual prepared for life, irrespective of any challenge. The special and general educators added that there are life skill classes and workshops for them and for the students.The learning through these sessions are used in the class.The subject mater is used to deliver life-skills in them. Case vignette are discussed with them in language classes, class- teacher periods, value education classes etc.These are reinforced using spontaneous life situations and subject matter.As shared by them, Self-awareness, empathy, coping with stress and emotions, problem solving, and communication are some of skills which are very important for effective learning. The level of confidence goes up, they get comfortable socially with their peers, and are able to express their needs.

Repetition and reinforcement(RR): 'Repeat to remember and remember to repeat' is the mantra

for remembering content. In addition to memorising, repetition also helps in understanding the task better. Reinforcement encourages repetition of the task. This ultimately culminates into learning of the concept. Al l people involved in learning of the learning disabled feel that this is a very effective way in learning. Special educators, general educators, parents and students have a common view about the effectiveness of repetition and reinforcement.

Clear and Short instructions(CI): Clear and short instructions, given one at a time leads to accomplishment of the task. Multiple instructions create a lot of confusion to learning disabled students. They usually land up with the last instruction or the first one which they heard with full attention. Therefore, it is important to be clear in the instruction, and expected goals. If the instructions are well-paced and given slowly, they comprehend them. Once they learn to follow instruction, another instruction worded with a simple sentence is added. Gradually, with pacing, and gradual addition, they learn to comprehend at least three instructions at a time for a correlated task. Special educators, general educators both feel that giving short and clear instructions is an effective method for enhancing comprehension in them. It helps them to deal with three or more points in any given context. It is highly effective and has a significant weightage in pedagogies followed for the learning disabled.

Conclusion:

From the findings and discussion, it can be concluded that life-skills education, psychological security and short, clear instructions are most effective to initiate and accomplish learning goals in learning disabled students. Parents' collaboration with the teachers and follow-up about their child's progress, need based accommodations provided by the education boards and multi-sensory teaching add a great deal to their learning. In addition to these, task analysis, graded level of difficulty and direct declaration of questions also help them in enhancing task completion. While different pedagogies are being used for the learning disabled in inclusive classroom, it needs to be mentioned that all strategies that are used for learning disabled are equally effective for the non-learning disabled also.Moreover, there is subject substitution. They have the provision of changing their subject at class IX level. They are given the option of exemption of the third language. With more practical based subjects, they are able to perform better. Inclusive education goals can be accomplished by engaging all learners irrespective of their challenges. Learning can be enhanced by devising strategies suited to them and addressing the diversity in a way which benefits all learners.

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