Cultural Perspectives on Learning Disabilities and Inclusive Education

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Abstract
Children with learning disabilities display abnormalities in one or more fundamental psychological processes related to comprehending and utilising written or spoken language. These conditions are revealed in reading, writing, mathematical concepts, spelling, talking, listening, and thinking. These comprise conditions such as developing aphasia, dyslexia, brain damage, minor brain dysfunction, and perceptual issues. They exclude learning difficulties that are principally brought on by intellectual disabilities, emotional issues, visual, hearing, motor impairments, or unfavourable environmental circumstances. These children are near or above average in intelligence, impulsive, distractible, poor in language organisation and abstract ideas, and hyperactive and hypoactive in different situations. Most research on learning difficulties has concentrated almost entirely on the individual, particularly the neurobiological or organic bases of the problems. There has been a lack of studies on the impact of cultural influences on learning impairments. However, cultural perspective is crucial for understanding learning problems within culturally heterogeneous groups. From this perspective, it is impractical to separate learning potential and difficulties children face from the contexts in which they grow and develop. Although we cannot deny the neurobiological bases of learning disabilities, at the same time, we also have to be considerate of the fact that the development and expression of learning disabilities are strongly impacted by the nature of a child's cultural environment. The goal of inclusive education is to offer all students, regardless of ability or background, with equal opportunity to study and succeed. Cultural competence, or the ability to effectively navigate and engage with diverse cultural perspectives, is integral to implementing inclusive practices. Educators must be sensitive to their students' cultural norms, values, and communication styles to create a supportive and inclusive learning environment. This chapter explores the intersection of cultural perspectives with learning disabilities and inclusive education, highlighting the importance of cultural competence in supporting students with diverse learning needs.

Keywords: Learning disabilities, cultural perspective, inclusive education

Introduction

In recent decades, the discourse surrounding learning disabilities and inclusive education has shifted towards a more culturally sensitive approach. Acknowledging students' diverse cultural backgrounds is essential in ensuring that educational practices are inclusive and effective for all learners. This chapter explores the intersection of cultural perspectives with learning disabilities and inclusive education, highlighting the importance of cultural competence in supporting students with diverse learning needs.

Some children struggle greatly to acquire basic academic abilities, such as those required to excel in reading, writing, speaking, listening, and arithmetic, even though their intellectual ability is average or above average. These problems could represent the outcome of a learning disability. The Learning Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) defines a learning disability as a condition in which a child's success falls significantly short of what one could expect from that child. Problems largely caused by emotional disturbances, intellectual disabilities, visual, hearing, are not included in the category of learning disabilities.

Children with learning disabilities display abnormalities in one or more fundamental psychological processes related to comprehending and utilising written or spoken language. These conditions are revealed in reading, writing, mathematical concepts, spelling, talking, listening, and thinking. These comprise conditions such as developing aphasia, dyslexia, brain damage, minor brain dysfunction, and perceptual issues. They exclude learning difficulties that are principally brought on by intellectual disabilities, emotional issues, visual, hearing, motor impairments, or unfavourable environmental circumstances. These children are near or above average in intelligence, impulsive, distractible, poor in language organisation and abstract ideas, and hyperactive and hypoactive in different situations. They have severe reading problems. Emotionally unstable, these children are over-dependent. They display deficiencies in memory processes and thinking.

Causes of Learning Disability

Learning disabilities can be categorised based on three factors: genetic, environmental, and organic. In regard to organic Causes, minimal brain dysfunction is the cause of learning disabilities. The central nervous system, which includes the brain and spinal cord, is where the malfunction is found. The minimal dysfunction is the cause of the

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malfunction rather than any damage. Cerebral haemorrhage, cerebral disease from high fever, head injury, intrauterine environment, early delivery, anoxia, physical trauma, and constitutional-generic-neurochemical dysfunction are the causes of minimal brain dysfunction. Not all forms of learning disabilities are caused by brain dysfunction, nor do all brain dysfunctions lead to learning disabilities. Low blood sugar, or hypoglycemia, is the root cause of learning difficulties. Learning difficulties can result from any factor that damages the nervous system. However, Genetic Reasons for Hyperactivity and learning difficulties are inherited traits. Almost 20% of children who were hyperactive had at least one hyperactive parent. Learning impairments are more common in children with Turner's syndrome. Further, in relation to, Environmental Causes, Rubella infection, alcohol intake, and drug use are examples of maternal variables that are known to have a detrimental impact. Pregnancy-related issues include anoxia (lack of oxygen), delivery trauma that damages the brain, and learning disabilities in children who receive neonatal critical care. A lack of early experience and stimulation might lead to a learning deficit. It is also brought on by inadequate or poor instruction.

Overview of Cultural Diversity

According to Lancaster P. E. (2001), children derive their sense of identity from their cultural background. Children's emotional, social, physical, and linguistic development are influenced by the distinct cultural stimuli they are exposed to from birth, such as food, language, art, and religious practices and beliefs (Heiman T., 2008) [9]. Learning can be hampered when a child's self-identity conflicts with the social environment because of cultural differences. Since, culture is such a strong predictor of a child's future wellbeing, professionals who work with children-such as social workers, counsellors, and specialists-need to be aware of the ways in which culture affects children's development and how individuals learn and mature (Blundell R., 2015) [3].

The individual has been the primary focus of the majority of research on learning difficulties, particularly when it comes to the neurobiological or organic roots of the issues. Studies on how cultural variables affect learning difficulties are limited. However, a novel approach to understanding learning disabilities comes from a cultural perspective. A cultural perspective is crucial for understanding learning problems within culturally heterogeneous groups. From this perspective, it is impractical to separate learning potential and difficulties children face from the contexts in which they grow and develop. Although we cannot deny the neurobiological bases of learning disabilities, at the same time, we also have to be considerate of the fact that the development and expression of learning disabilities are strongly impacted by the nature of a child's cultural environment. Fortunately, instructors who possess cultural competence assist learners from diverse cultural backgrounds by demonstrating an appreciation and understanding of many cultures and how they contribute to the unique value of each child (Antshel K M, et al., 2006) [2].

Importance of Cultural Factors and Values

Cultural factors such as family practices, family support resources, child-rearing beliefs and customs, parenting practices, relationships, daily routines, and activities can play a significant role in understanding the experiences of families and persons with disabilities in many social environments. Discriminatory habits and beliefs can provide several obstacles for students with learning impairments. Due to a lack of knowledge about learning impairments and their invisibility, students may encounter these obstacles in their classrooms, communities, and homes (Sandy P T, et al., 2013). Additionally, it's critical to take into account how a student's learning disability intersects with other facets of their social identity, as this could make the discrimination, they encounter on a daily basis worse (Weisner T S., 1997) [13].

All of these factors are influenced by cultural values, which in turn guide and explain one's cognitive, emotional and motivational practices. As a result, there are significant cultural differences in the ways that people think, recall, reason, and express themselves. The cultural criteria established by individualistic and collectivistic principles have been utilized to ascertain the functioning of civilizations and/or people. While autonomy, openness to change, self-direction, and independence are valued in individualistic cultures, social harmony, interdependence, obedience, and sustaining close relationships are valued in collective values. Therefore, when defining and assessing learning difficulties we must acknowledge the differences in culturally defined competencies, mandating the definitional criteria to be broad by reconsidering the relative contribution of biologically based and culturally based conditions. Cultural diversity should not be ruled out explicitly as in current definitions of learning disabilities.

Ethnicity Vs Culture

It is essential to understand that ethnicity and culture are different, and it is wrong to assume that members within ethnic or cultural groups are homogenous. For example, the designation North Indians includes many different groups whose lifestyles and cultures vary dramatically. One must consider the difference between Kashmiris', Punjabis', Himachalis' etc. and the difference between North Indians belonging to rural and urban settings. However, most of the literature available on cultural diversity has assumed that ethnicity and culture are same thus, leading to serious limitations in findings, questionable inferences and generalizations related to learning difficulties. It is the nature of parents' culture and not their ethnic identity that affects the literary experiences they provide to their children. For example, the ages at which parents initiate reading activities with their children is correlated with the parents' background in India specifically, whether they grew up in small rural communities or in urban communities where there was opportunity to attend school.

Learning is not included when it is defined in terms of children's own play forms and subcultures. Such an approach may have the unfavourable effect of lessening or even eliminating the child's innate drive for learning, as well as disrupting, impeding, or impairing the child's future development (Dyson L L., et al., 2003) [7]. While culture changes over time as people and organizations adjust their beliefs to survive and adapt, ethnic identity tends to endure. Culture keeps evolving over many generations, providing hard-won solutions to counter challenging circumstances. However, these changes are slow and often unnoticed.

In a multicultural country like India, one dilemma is how to account for cultural and ethnic diversity in the education of children and youth. I want to illustrate this by briefly discussing a case from the Child Guidance Clinic where I work.

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A 9 year old boy presented with chief complaints of poor reading and writing scholastic skills in English Language. History revealed that the boy belonged to rural Gujarat and his parents migrated to North India in an urban setting (Chandigarh) for better earning opportunities. The boy got admission in an elite private school in EWS quota. This was a blessing in disguise for the parents who could not even think of providing him with basic education. However, the boy started facing academic difficulties. It seemed to the teachers that he could not understand and grasp the concepts taught. On MISIC, the boy performed well and his IQ was 97 indicating average intellectual functioning. In this case his poor achievement level would be attributed to language differences. The boy conversed with his family in Gujarati Language. The parents are not well versed with Hindi leave aside English. Above that they reside in a rural area in outskirts of Chandigarh where the child is not exposed to the environment that is parallel to the environment of children who attend the same elite school as his. Also, there is a lack of concern for literacy within his home. Therefore, we can conclude with an understanding that the boy is facing problems in academics not because of any neurobiological deficit in his functioning rather he is facing difficulties in English language as he has to adjust to a cultural model that is very different from the academic and occupational model that is characteristic of urban and industrializes societies.

Therefore, as a clinician, while assessing it is important to give value to the ethnic and cultural background to which the child belongs so that we don't impact his life negatively by misdiagnosing for disabilities.

Cultural Diversity in Education
Cultural diversity encompasses individual variations stemming from their backgrounds and characteristics. This encompasses nationality, language, religion, political views, race, ethnicity, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status.

Cultural norms are influenced by these elements, which also affect how people interact in peer groups, social circles, and family or community situations. Although linguistic and cultural diversity are frequently addressed together as CLD, it's crucial to remember that the two categories are not interchangeable, even though cultural diversity may include linguistic variety. Even if structural change in society is necessary, educators may play a crucial role in removing obstacles in the classroom by creating an inclusive learning environment that embraces all students. Students' classroom experiences can be enhanced by implementing a culturally responsive pedagogy that celebrates diversity in a responsible and consistent manner (Al-Yagon M, *et al*., 2004) [1].

Educators/Special educators must prioritise cultural responsiveness for all students, particularly those with disabilities, as their cultural backgrounds can significantly impact their educational choices and outcomes.

Inclusive Education and Cultural Competence
Regardless of their skills or origins, inclusive education attempts to provide all students equal chances to learn and develop. Cultural competence, or the ability to effectively navigate and engage with diverse cultural perspectives, is integral to implementing inclusive practices. Educators must be sensitive to their students' cultural norms, values, and communication styles to create a supportive and inclusive learning environment. The realisation that "all students learn differently and that these differences may be connected to

background, language, family structure, and social or cultural identity" is a key component of culturally responsive education (Chukwu N E etal., 2019) [5].

Cultural competence in inclusive education involves understanding cultural diversity and actively incorporating culturally responsive teaching strategies. This can entail utilizing culturally appropriate teaching materials, encouraging inclusive classroom conversations that respect students' cultural identities and experiences, and introducing a variety of viewpoints into the curriculum. By valuing and affirming students' cultural backgrounds, educators can promote a sense of belonging and create opportunities for meaningful learning experiences.

How to Enhance Understanding Concerning Cultural Diversities
i). **Language and Communication:** Assess the language(s) spoken at home and the student's proficiency in each language. Consider how language differences may impact communication, comprehension, and academic performance. Additionally, be aware of nonverbal communication cues that may vary across cultures.
ii). **Cultural Beliefs and Values:** Explore the students' and their families' cultural beliefs, values, and traditions. Consider how cultural norms regarding education, disability, family roles, and community interactions may influence students' learning experiences and preferences.
iii). **Family Dynamics and Support Systems:** Evaluate the role of the family in the student's education and support network. Consider the level of family involvement, communication preferences, and cultural practices related to parenting, decision-making, and collaboration with educators.
iv). **Learning Styles and Preferences:** Cultural diversities may impact students' learning styles, preferences, and approaches to learning. Consider how cultural factors such as collectivism versus individualism, oral versus written traditions, and the role of storytelling and kinaesthetic learning may influence instructional strategies and accommodations.[5]
v). **Intersectionality:** Recognize the connections between cultural diversity and other facets of identity, including socioeconomic class, gender, race, and ethnicity. Examine the potential impact of these overlapping identities on the student's particular strengths, difficulties, and support necessities.

Role of Educators in Teaching Children from Cultural Diversities
i). **Culturally Responsive Teaching Strategies:** Special educators utilize teaching strategies that honour and respect learners' cultural diversity. This includes incorporating cooperative learning, storytelling, and experiential learning activities that align with cultural learning styles and preferences.
ii). **Language Support:** Special educators provide language support services to students with diverse linguistic backgrounds, such as English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction, bilingual education, or language development programs, to facilitate academic language proficiency.
iii). **Cross-Cultural Communication:** Special educators develop strong communication skills to interact with culturally diverse students and their families effectively. This involves sensitivity to cultural differences in

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communication styles, nonverbal cues, and interpersonal relationships.

iv). **Family and Community Engagement:** Recognizing both families and community people play a critical role in assisting culturally diverse learners in achieving academic achievement, special educators actively incorporate them in the educational process.

v). **Individualized Support Plans:** Special educators develop individualised support plans that consider each learner's cultural background, beliefs, and values. This may involve collaborating with families and cultural liaisons to identify culturally appropriate interventions and accommodations.

vi). **Peer Support Networks:** Special educators facilitate peer support networks where culturally diverse learners can connect with peers with similar cultural backgrounds and experiences. This provides opportunities for mutual support, validation, and social belonging.

vii). **Cultural Sensitivity and Respect:** Special educators demonstrate cultural sensitivity, respect, and empathy towards culturally diverse learners. They establish inviting and inclusive learning environments where each student is given the tools they need to succeed and feels appreciated and accepted.

Case Profile-I
Mast. Muttu, a 10-year-old boy from Kerala with Malayalam as his mother tongue, sought help at a child guidance centre due to concerns raised by his parents. They noticed that he struggled with social interactions, often remaining quiet in school and exhibiting below-average academic performance. Following a comprehensive assessment, it is determined that his exposure to languages other than Malayalam, particularly English, was limited due to his family background as Malayali's but he has exposure of Hindi also. His parents work as laborers and do not belong to an educational background.

Recognizing the importance of providing him with structured support, Sri Arvind began therapy sessions. These sessions focused on enhancing his academic skills and improving his social interaction abilities. As a result of the interventions, by followed the bilingual approach, Mast. Muttu has shown remarkable progress. He now actively participates in social activities, engages in group interactions, and even enjoys participating in play & dance activities. Moreover, there has been a noticeable improvement in his academic performance compared to before.

This transformation underscores the positive impact that tailored interventions can have on children facing challenges related to both academics and socialization. Continued support from the centre and his family will be essential in sustaining his progress and fostering further growth.

Challenges and Opportunities
While cultural competence is essential for promoting inclusive education, it is not without its challenges. Educators may encounter barriers such as implicit biases, lack of cultural awareness, and limited resources for supporting diverse learners. Addressing these challenges requires ongoing professional development, collaboration with culturally diverse communities, and a commitment to social justice and equity in education.

Despite the challenges, embracing cultural diversity in inclusive education presents numerous opportunities for enriching the learning experiences of all students. By fostering an inclusive learning environment that celebrates diversity, educators can help students gain a greater awareness of global perspectives, empathy, and critical thinking abilities by creating an inclusive learning environment that values diversity. Inclusive education not only benefits students with learning disabilities but also contributes to the creation of more equitable and socially just educational systems.

How Can Promote Awareness on Diversity & Multicultural In Education
Promoting awareness of diversity and multiculturalism in education requires intentional efforts at various levels of the educational system.

i). **Curriculum Integration:** Incorporate diverse perspectives, histories, and cultures into the curriculum across all subject areas.

ii). **Professional Development:** Allow educators access to continual professional development opportunities and training on subjects like equity, cultural competence, and inclusive teaching methods.

iii). **Student Engagement:** Encourage student-led initiatives that celebrate diversity and multiculturalism, such as cultural heritage months, diversity clubs, and international festivals. Provide learners the chance to relate to their peers about their own cultural backgrounds and experiences.

iv). **Parent and Family Involvement:** Engage parents and families in discussions and activities that promote awareness of diversity and multiculturalism. Provide resources, workshops, and family nights that empower parents to support their children's learning and celebrate their cultural identities.

v). **Inclusive Policies and Practices:** To ensure they are inclusive and equitable for all students. Address issues such as bias, discrimination, and bullying through proactive measures that promote respect, acceptance, and understanding among students and staff.

vi). **Celebration of Diversity:** Celebrate diversity and multiculturalism through school-wide events, assemblies, and recognition ceremonies. Highlight the contributions and achievements of individuals from diverse backgrounds and cultures to foster a sense of pride and belonging among all students.

Challenges with Learning Disability Identification and Assessment
As far as issues of assessment and identification are concerned it is widely recognized that the commonly used psychometric approaches to psycho educational evaluation are inadequate and inappropriate for assessing children from different cultural backgrounds. The notion of "culture-free" assessment is misleading as learning cannot be separated from the culture in which the child lives and grows. Therefore, it is suggested that consideration be given to the type and degree of children's preliteracy experiences, their possibilities for and exposure to reading, and other educationally significant activities, before classifying children as learning challenged based on conventional assessments.

Giving value to family and cultural variables substantially broadens the content of psychoeducational assessment. It means that restructuring of traditional models of parent-professional relationships and interactions is needed. Such restructuring would be incomplete without changes in professionals' views and beliefs about culturally and

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ethnically diverse children and families. In addition to attitudes of professional's certain other factors like legislative regulations, ethical considerations relating to privacy, demands of time, and parents' perception and cooperation constrain comprehensive and effective assessment that takes cultural variables into account.

Conclusion

Although learning disabilities are not cultural in nature, they are neurodevelopmental, and students with learning disabilities possess cultural knowledge that comes from their daily lives and offers chances to improve learning. The relationship between culture and education does not fade away; rather, it gets stronger as people enter middle childhood and adolescence. As a result, individuals who are interested in using culture to enhance learning should be careful to give children's cultural enrichment equal weight with their physical and mental health, as these factors are particularly crucial during this time of incredibly rapid developmental change. From the moment of our birth, culture shapes our growth and affects us as we mature. For example, children's development of language, belief systems, values, and self-concept as individuals and members of society can all be influenced by culture. Due to a misperception of the cultural nature of learning, children are no longer exposed to play-based learning environments, which are very beneficial for fostering learning and sense-making. Additionally, schools must adhere to the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in their policies and practices.

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