



ISSN Print: 2394-7500  
ISSN Online: 2394-5869  
Impact Factor: 5.2  
IJAR 2017; 3(12): 308-313  
www.allresearchjournal.com  
Received: 18-10-2017  
Accepted: 19-11-2017

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## Slow learners – Causes, problems and educational programmes

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### Abstract

The child we call a slow learner is not in need of special education. He is likely to need some extra time and help in regular class room. He is capable by learning like an average child. A slow learner is one who learner at a slower than average rate. The causes of slow learning are low intellectual learning and personal factors such as illness and absence from school, The environmental factors also contribute to this slow learning. Identification of the slow learners and the crucial step. Then we have to advise educational programme for the slow learners. Slow learner work best with a changeful designed step. Slow learners can learn if instruction is approached changefully. The ways in this reigned are tutoring and remedial instruction. In this present chapter is dealing above slow learners and their causes, problems and educational programmes.

**Keywords:** Causes of slow learning, identification, educational programmes, curriculum

### Introduction

Slow learning children are not special education students but they represent a group of educationally retarded. The contributing factors are cultural, poverty, family inadequacy, parental disharmony and in a few causes, unfavorable school conditions, school absences. Hence, this children need suitable arrangements in regular schools. Although some of these children receive education in special school and special class, they finally move to regular school after backwardness in removed. Identification of slow learning children is not obvious except for educational backwardness. These children display weakness in thinking, finding, out relationships, similarity, familiarity, reasoning, poor development of concept, language, and number concepts, memory. Socio-emotional characteristics include feeling of in security, withdrawal, immaturity, regression and fantasy.

### Who is a Slow Learner?

It is a known fact that all children experience school-related problems at one time or another during their school years. A teacher on any working day may have to deal with problems ranging from aggressive behaviour to disinterest in the learning task. The cause of such difficulties may vary from an unknown conflict at home to simple headache. Such situations may result in poor academic performance and aggressive behaviour temporarily. Effective teachers tackle such problems easily. There is, however, another group of children who display prolonged learning difficulties. These are the children whose scholastic performance is below the average expected of their age-group. Most teachers who deal with average and below-average pupils meet children who do not seem to profit from the usual educational methods and content provided. The term 'backward' or 'slow learner' is reserved for these children who are not coping with the work normally expected of their age group (Bun, 1937) or whose scholastic performance is below the average expected of their age group (Kirman, 1975).

For Kirk (1962), rate of learning is the basis of identifying a child as slow learner, average or gifted. For Kirk, the slow-learning child is not considered mentally retarded because he is capable of achieving a moderate degree of academic success even though at a slower rate than the average child. He is educated in the regular classes without special provisions except an adaptation of the regular class programme to fit his slower learning ability. At the adult level, he is usually self-supporting, independent and socially adjusted.

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There are some children who have borderline retardation and some who have mild retardation. Individuals with borderline mental retardation blend with the normal population, and with proper training can achieve social and vocational adequacy. This group and those mild mental retardates who remain undetected in a class are often called 'slow learners.' The child we call a slow learner is one who is not necessarily retarded or in need of special education but is likely to need some extra time and help in a regular classroom. He is capable of learning just about anything that the average child is capable of; it just takes him longer. In other words, a slow learner is one who learns or is learning at a slower than average rate.

### Causes of Slow Learning

Every behavior has a cause, meaning and significance. The behavioural characteristics of slow learners are symptoms of conditions or some factors present either within the child or outside the child. Slow learning is caused by a variety of factors such as:

**(i) Low intellectual abilities such as subnormal intelligence.**

**(ii) Personal factors such as**

- long illness,
- long absence from school,
- undetected physical defects,
- poor cognitive entry characteristics.

**(iii) Environmental variables such as**

- poor home facilities for learning skills,
- low quality and quantity of food,
- shortage of sleep,
- adverse parental attitudes towards education,
- poor or inappropriate opportunities in school (large classes),
- poor quality of teaching,
- choosing inadequate or advanced materials,
- incompatibility between home and the school,
- Repeated changes of school and consequent changes in teaching styles and content.

**(iv) Emotional factors such as**

- dislike of teacher through classes of personality,
- negative parental attitudes to school creating in the child similar adverse attitudes,
- feeling of inadequacy,
- lack of confidence in self and need to achieve,
- Extreme timidity and anxiety giving rise to poor levels of attainment.

### Identification of Slow Learners

In every classroom, a large number of slow learners are noticed. These children with borderline or mild handicaps who attend the regular class are likely to drop out if their needs are not met. It is, therefore, necessary that these children are identified early and helped in their learning. A competent teacher should be alert to general characteristics of the associated classroom behaviour relating to learning difficulties of a child. For example, the slow learner requires more help and time to acquire the skill than his average peer. The slow learner will rely on concrete learning rather than abstract learning.

Slow learners are to be identified by employing various procedures and using various tools and techniques. These are as follows:

1. Day-to-day observation of classroom behaviour of children by the teacher.
2. Assessment of children's performance in specific subjects based on the Cumulative Record Card or school marks.
3. Opinion of parents about the child's progress and difficulties in learning various subjects, doing homework, his language difficulties, emotional problems, illness, injuries and physical defects and problems.
4. Measures of intellectual ability or IQ scores.
5. Competence-based tests and diagnostic tests in various subjects.

However, if slow learners are to be helped in their learning difficulties, they must be identified early in schools, because prolonged learning difficulties may imply placement of such children in special schools which are very rare in India.

### Educational Programmes for the Learners

The slow learner is capable of achieving a moderate degree of academic success though with additional time and help. They are capable of being educated in the regular class with few adaptations. As adults, they are self-supporting, independent, and socially adjusted. If the needs of such children are not met, they experience failure and drop out prematurely from school. The difficulty is that most of these children are not diagnosed as slow learners until they attend school and begin to fail. This calls for early identification, diagnosis of their learning difficulties and proper instructional provisions for them.

Adolescent slow learners are usually benefited from the following plans:

### Carefully Guided Instruction

Slow learners work best with a carefully designed, step by step technique, and additional time and help. Considerable repetition is usually necessary and the material should be adapted appropriately for the slow learner. Positive reinforcement technique should be used as much as possible. The following recommendations are useful for the teacher:

1. The teacher needs to emphasize the concrete and the specific with regard to the problems and materials.
2. Instruction should be directed towards satisfying those needs that are more immediate and more easily recognised and identified.
3. Slow learners should be given more time, attention and guidance by the teacher until they reach the expected average standard.
4. Instruction should be less dependent on conventional printed materials.
5. Out-of-school resources like the field trip should be used more frequently.
6. There is need for greater utilization of audio-visual aids.
7. Learning units should be organised around life's problems more than around academic subjects.
8. Teachers should avoid any kind of competition or comparison between normal or gifted students and slow learners.

9. All types of labeling such as 'stupid,' 'idiot,' the 'slow learner,' the 'dull,' the 'back bencher' should be avoided by the teacher as this may lower the child's self-concept, self-esteem and lead to greater frustration, anxiety, withdrawal and delinquent tendencies.
10. Teachers should discover any specific skills slow learners may possess. If possible, let them demonstrate their skills for other students.
11. Teachers should be careful about the number of things taught and the abstractness of the material. Sheer numbers can overwhelm any one, especially the slow learners. The more abstract the material, the greater difficulty the slow learner will have with it.

### Individualized Instruction

Slow learners can learn as well as fast learners if instruction is approached systematically and sensitively, if they are given extra time and if they are helped in their learning difficulties. This was the proposition maintained by Bloom (1965). Bruner, a cognitive psychologist, also held similar views. Any concept can be taught to any child if appropriate instructional methods and procedures are utilized. Individualized instruction is most useful in the education of slow learners.

In individualized instruction, the methods and materials of instruction are adjusted to the needs and abilities of individual learners. There are mainly three forms of individualised instruction, such as:

1. Tutoring,
2. Individually Prescribed Instruction (IPI) and
3. Individually Guided Education (IGE).

Of these three forms, tutoring is a popular programme in schools and homes. The IPI and the IGE are new developments.

### Tutoring

Tutoring is a face-to-face, one-to-one relationship or situation in which the tutor has the primary responsibility of helping a child in his learning difficulty. Tutoring may be also done in a small group consisting of four to five children, but the essence of the situation remains the same in a small group as in one-to-one situation: individual help, attention and time. Thus instruction that is individualised, whether in one-to-one situation or small group situation is called tutoring.

Usually teachers act as tutors, but able classmates, older students and adult volunteers can also be tutors. Older children can talk their language and can provide excellent models for them. Children teaching children is not a new idea; it is very popular in homes and schools.

### Remedial Instruction

Slow learners are benefited mostly from remedial instruction. Remedial instruction for slow learners refers to two types of programmes:

1. Eliminating ineffective habits and unwholesome attitudes and re-teaching skills which have been incorrectly learned. This refers to remediation of defects.
2. Teaching for the first time those habits, skills and attitudes which have never been learned but should have been and which are needed by such children. This refers to developmental teaching or developing increased competence.

Remedial programme involves taking a child where he is and from that point leading him to greater achievement. Remedial teaching is just good teaching concerned with two types of deficiencies—the presence of bad habits and the absence of good habits.

Remedial instruction requires proper diagnosis of their specific difficulties in various subjects and understanding their problems before actual instruction begins. In certain cases, slow learning is caused by factors other than low intellectual ability. For example, visual defects may cause reading difficulties; emotional factors may cause general academic failure. In such cases, interview with parents and the classroom teacher or a simple medical examination may solve the problem.

Remedial instruction can be given by the regular teacher, full-time remedial teacher or visiting remedial teacher. In Scotland and England, a large number of schools are utilising the services of visiting remedial teacher who visits a number of schools in a single day and provides remedial instruction to the students who need it on a part-time basis. The remedial teacher is a specialist teacher who uses alternate learning materials, methods, audio-visual aids and workbooks in tutoring situation.

### The Organisation of Curriculum

In case, the slow learning children are placed in the special class or special school, the curriculum has to be based on logical, physical and social aspects. The contents however, may vary according to the age and need of the child. The curriculum must be specially designed to assist the total growth as well as to develop basic skills and knowledge. It should not be a mere watering down of the curriculum designed for a normal school. To segregate children and give such a curriculum would be a travesty of special educational treatment. On rare occasions they should be placed in a special class.

However, it must involve (a) central core language and number (b) periphery subjects e.g., environment, creative and aesthetic activities, and practical interests. Both should be related. Time table must keep a balance between core and periphery subjects as well as social and group activities. The organisation should take the following consideration into account.

- a. The smaller the school, the more generous should be teacher-pupil ratio. The class size should 20. The school is all age and mixed.
- b. The younger the age the smaller should be the class if the teacher is to provide stimulating environment.
- c. Some provision should be made for extra remedial work.

More specifically, Tansley and Guilford (1971) suggested that the teacher of slow learners should—

- a. Organise the class in small, carefully, selected group.
- b. Have wide range of supply of activities e.g. readers, free access to arts and craft materials.
- c. Pay particular attention to preparation of materials.
- d. Allow brighter children to help duller ones.
- e. Encourage children to participate in planning activities.
- f. Allow as much as freedom as possible within the well-established limits.
- g. Avoid rigidity and accept students' suggestion.
- h. Be sensitive to children's reactions.

- i. Have several periods each week when the class is engaged as a whole on one activity, story, drama, music.
- j. Try to obtain parental cooperation.
- k. Do not be reluctant to admit failure with an individual child.

### **Language Teaching**

In school verbal instructions and explanations are quite important. Many of the slow learners have retarded speech: articulation, vocabulary, brief sentence, grammatical errors. Emotional reluctance is the chief reason for their backwardness of expression. They need a great deal of speech stimulation through play, and through talking to adults, listening to them. Expression is often lacking in order, sequence and selectivity. Errors in usage are quite frequent i.e., he runned, he caught etc. These children are also poor in, remembering messages and listening to instructions, stories and other forms of spoken words. Attention therefore, should be given to listening and reproduction skills.

Poor language may be due to several factors: poor background of speech and language at home, a limited background of experience, emotional and social factors and the limitation of the slow learner's thinking capacity.

These children can develop their language by talking about what they have seen or done, by discussing what they are going to do and how they are going to do it. These are most effective for they evoke stronger feelings of enthusiasm and interest and therefore expression.

The teacher should guide and stimulate the child's thinking about his experiences e.g., what they noticed while concerning to school, climbing tree, making and explaining scrap books, explaining what they learned in television, role playing in a drama in school, listening to stories, puppetry, allowing the puppets to speak to each other, conversation among peer groups. The fact that many children do acquire a better form of speech for use in school does suggest that progress can be made.

### **Teaching Reading**

Reading similarly is not an isolated skill. It is an aspect of the integrated language development programme which includes speaking, writing and spelling. For slow learning or backward children a sound reading programme is necessary. It should consist of:

- a. The development of reading readiness.
- b. The acquisition of a sight vocabulary of meaningful words.
- c. The development of independent reading aided by the use of phonic analysis and other word recognition techniques.
- d. The development of speedy, relaxed, silent reading for content and ideas.

#### **a. The Development of Reading Readiness**

In the early stages visual method should be used. Teacher should concentrate on the acquisition of slight vocabulary of meaningful words. The classroom should contain plentiful materials to allow activities at different levels of maturity: sand, water, paint, clay, toys, colour, picture books, scrap books, group models. These increase knowledge and interests, vocabulary, powerful expression, improved work habits, social relationships, interest in reading, classification,

labeling, visual discrimination by looking at pictures, jigsaw puzzles, matching games, drawing and tracing pictures, personal and social development through play.

#### **b. The Acquisition of a Sight Vocabulary of Meaningful Words**

The teacher gives written sentences and words and ask the child to draw a picture on the opposite page about what she/he has read. The child was asked to trace over the words and sentence. The teacher makes independent sentence cards and word cards independent of the book. In this way, the child recognises the words. Each child learns comprehension and it becomes an ego involved activity. In this way the slow learning children learned, consolidated their learning, learned vocabulary. The child gradually learns through supplementary materials.

#### **c. The Development of Independent Reading Aided by the use of Phonic Analysis and other Word Recognition Techniques**

Backward children are usually deficient in these abilities and require a systematic programme of word recognition exercises of reading progress is to be maintained. It should be a rigid, isolated, elaborate course of phonic drills or word form, and an interesting, integrated controlled attack on the analysis and synthesis of sound units which will lead to continuing improvements in reading for content and ideas.

#### **d. The Development of Speedy, Relaxed, Silent Reading for Content and Ideas**

The choice of books is important at this stage to cater for the children's individual interests and reading levels. Backward/SL boys should be little less difficult than their level of understanding SL girls like family situation books, fairy stories and books on animals. With these children particular attention has to be paid for word meaning, comprehension and development of ideas.

Writing plays an important part in reading process and programme. It assists visual discrimination and memory and the relation between visual and auditory patterns.

Some fundamental cognitive incapacity underlie reading problems of slow learner. In fact, it requires a significant change in the attitudes. The anxiety which is likely to control the slow learner should be reduced by giving continuous encouragement and initial success. The crux of the matter is motivation. The nonreader is to be persuaded that reading is interesting, it can be useful to him and he can master it.

Remedial teaching must take into account the child's weakness noticed at reading. Silent reading and refreshing are quite significant. Silent reading can be brought by work sheets with instructions. The other method is kinesthetic method i.e., tracing and writing words. Systematic work in spelling and a technique of learning would be important in doing so.

### **Teaching Arithmetic**

Arithmetic is a way of thinking about number. Arithmetic teaching therefore is concerned with application of number system to the arrangement, manipulation, and measurement of verities and the development of the ability to deal with member relationship symbolically and by abstraction in the absence of concrete objects. They should be taught through concrete-pictorial-symbolic modes in addition to general

pedagogical concerns being kept in mind. Piagetian approach to teaching number system and arithmetic is quite effective i.e., conservation and formal logical operations.

The Piagetian approach to teaching of concept of number and arithmetic through conservation exercises have been exemplary, e.g., more less, same or less, long and short, heavy and light, fast and slow, middle and end, before and after. The readers are here referred to a book written by the author (Panda, 1993) [6] on this approach. The examples of mass, quantity, number, area, volume, movement are all found in the text.

### Teaching Creative Arts

It has been said earlier that most slow learners enter into school with needs of achievement and success to counteract their loss of confidence and sense of inadequacy. Many children are able to achieve success or have it contrived for them in one or other creative activities. On this foundation academic achievement can be based. Apart from this there is a valuable relief and relaxation obtained through touching and handling of materials of moving about and doing. It is as if saying X is frustrated and fatigued in his school work then let him do his painting. There is much to be said in favor of formal work being closely and genuinely linked with creative work. Pent up feelings and hostility or frustration finds a safe outlet in a free drama. The fact that such outlets are achieved in a situation watched and controlled by a tolerant teacher seems to make emotional release all the more effective. Art has therapeutic value.

One of the outstanding characteristics of slow learner is poor concentration. They are often distractible and lacking in persistence. Within limits the ability to concentrate is learnt in the repeated experience of absorbing and satisfying activity. Plan and creative work offer conditions for the development of concentration and persistence.

What can the teacher do? The teacher *can* provide variety of materials and suitable conditions and secondly help and advice regarding their use. The child should be allowed to work more freely and spontaneously.

### Knowing Around

Slow learning children can not advance much but their intellectual limitations, often reinforced by social and cultural ones, restrict the range of his experience as well as the depth of his understanding. The child's activities in relation to his environment nourishes his mental growth and language development. Their experience and knowledge can be increased at the initial stage by understanding of the natural environment, why and how things happen exploration, talking and questioning. nature study.

It is said, after Seguin-

1. Teach nothing indoors that can be learned outdoors.
2. Teach nothing with dead things when you can make observations on living things.
3. Nature should be classroom and the school book in case of difficulties.

Of course, the metropolis/urban schools may apply these principles by appropriately having pets and aquarium and by arranging field trips occasionally.

### Social Development

This can be looked from two points of view.

- a. Personal Qualities.
- b. Social Qualities.

The personal qualities of the slow learning children. should ensure development of personal hygiene, capacity to organise leisure time activities and capable of understanding limitations and of matching the aspirations to the abilities. Social qualities would include getting along with others, listening to and learning from others, as well as avoiding over compensatory behaviour such as showing off, boasting and lying. These can be cultivated during the school years by training mentioned earlier under the social and emotional characteristic heading. Social education must be viewed as an integral part of the whole educational process—in play, in school work, at home. The special/school special class teacher must have some understanding of the child's family and community setting. The regular classroom teacher where the slow learners are found at the early stages of education must be sensitive to these needs and provide directions. The following are some of the cardinal principles.

1. Children can not become socially competent and mentally well if they do not have feelings of success. In school only curricular success is assessed rightly or wrongly.
2. All learning situations and procedures should be so planned as to encourage independent work habits and self-direction. Pupils anticipation in learning is a must.
3. Some aspects of social education must be developed step by step procedure, demonstration and daily practice (feeding, dressing, cleanliness).
4. Many children come from home where discipline is inconsistent or nonexistent. They have no sense of right or wrong or have poor moral standards. The child therefore has to be taught what is expected of him.
5. The way school and class are run as communities can make a contribution to the development of social responsibility. The discipline system should therefore be consistent and fair and imposition of authority may be kept at a minimum.

Only then development of independence, self-reliance and an ability to adapt the changes by the slow learners would be possible. The "regular class teacher" should have all these competencies outlook and experience to handle slow learners in the classroom integrated or otherwise.

### Conclusion

A competent teacher should be alert to general characteristics of the associated class room behavior related to learner difficulties of a child. The slow learner needs more time to acquire the skill than his average peer the slow learner will reply on concrete learning rather than abstract learning. This calls for early identification, diagnosis of their learning difficulties and proper instructional precisions for them. Adolescent slow learners are usually benefitted from carefully guided instruction.

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