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A study on the usage of online learning platforms for dyslexic students

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Abstract

Dyslexia, one of the conditions listed under the rights for persons with difficulties act, 2016, specifically refers to the reading and writing disabilities which is an incurable condition due to decoding and identification of speech sound issues. More personal attention, care and emotional support can help the students to cope up with the learning difficulties. Different online learning platforms are available which are specially curated to cater the needs of dyslexic students. This study aims to find parents' perspective about the usage of online learning platforms and the difficulties faced by dyslexic learners in school using questionnaire and interview methods. The study was able to find that the dyslexic learners have interest in using the online learning platforms.

Keywords: Dyslexia, dyslexic learners, online learning platforms

Introduction

"If a child cannot learn the way we teach maybe we should teach the way they learn"

Learning is a continuous process assisted by internal and external factors which increases the potential and performance of an individual. Foundation of learning is laid first at homes and then majorly in schools. When a student is not able to cope up with his or her peers, the student faces a difficulty in the learning process. It has not been so long since the terms 'learning disability' and 'dyslexia' have come into the public communication sphere and the education system. Earlier, only a few people were able to understand the difficulties and needs of the students. Majority of people, including teachers, parents, and the general public, did not view it as a serious issue. In an explorative study on the perception of families of children with specific learning disorder by Anamika Sahu, Rachna Bhargava, Rajesh Sagar and Manju Mehta in 2018, it was told that the parents were seen to have less conceptual knowledge about learning disabilities and the ways to deal with such children. This lack of knowledge among teachers and parents affects the learning atmosphere of the student and makes it a challenging task. Even though a drastic positive change is not visible, gradual change is happening in the attitude and perspectives.

In this century, with unimaginable growth in technology and science, everything seems less challenging and comparatively easy. Online learning platforms which are specially crafted for dyslexic learners incorporating various assistive technologies can enhance the learning pattern and make the process much more appealing and easier. It can act as an add on to the normal school education. Quality education is the right of every individual which cannot be denied because of a specific difficulty. Thus, online learning platform for dyslexic students will pave a path for inclusive education and independent learning.

This study tries to understand about online learning platforms for dyslexic students from a parent's view point. It also examines the difficulties faced by dyslexic learners in a normal school system from both teachers' and parents' perspectives.

Significance of the study

Several earlier studies were conducted to understand the different aspects of dyslexia while studies conducted on the usage of online learning platforms for dyslexic students are less.

It is important to know how the online platform works for the learners and how the various elements impact its usage. If more evaluations are conducted on the matter, improvements can be made in the learning platforms which directly impacts the dyslexic learners. The learning environment of dyslexia learners in a normal school system is not very comfortable when compared to their peers. Difficulties faced can vary from slight time management issues to social withdrawal symptoms. More clarity will be received on this topic when we investigate the perspectives of both teachers and parents. From the present study findings, multiple ways can be recommended to improve the learning atmosphere and make it an inclusive system.

Review of Literature

Tay Hui Yong and Siti Asjamiah Bte Asmuri in 2021 conducted 4 case studies in Singapore titled as 'Dyslexic Children's Experience of Home-Based Learning During School Closures' analysing the dyslexic children's experiences of home-based learning enhanced by online platforms during the coronavirus pandemic. The study participants and parents suggested that by paying attention to dyslexic-friendly use of technology, feedback-focused pedagogy and socio-economic support, the quality of education can be improved.

In the study titled 'Assistive Technologies to Support Students with Dyslexia' by Kara Dawson, Holly Lane, Jiawen Zhu and Pavlo Antonenko in 2018, it was found that dyslexic students need more than one assistive technology or tool to overcome their multiple challenges as potentials are different for everyone.

Roxani Skiada, Eva Soroniati, Anna Gardeli and Dimitrios Zissis in 2014 conducted an evaluative study titled 'EasyLexia: A Mobile Application for Children with Learning Difficulties' on 'EasyLexia'- a mobile application for children with learning disabilities. Students gained familiarity with the design and layout of the application soon which helped them to use the features without any assistance. Most of the students enjoyed using devices even in the absence of instructors.

Evaluation of Disleksia Belajar Mobile App for Assisting Dyslexic Junior School Students to Learn the Malay Language was an evaluative study conducted by Novia Admodisastro, Chan Kai Fung and Siti Suhaila Abdul Hamidon in 2021. The application used attractive fonts, text colours and learning contents which are termed as dyslexic-friendly. Dyslexic students found the application to be useful and felt that the application to be simple and easy which helped them to study by themselves.

A study titled 'Primary School Teacher's Awareness and Knowledge of Dyslexia in Qassim Region-Saudi Arabia' conducted by Alharbi Hatim Yousef in 2022 demonstrated that awareness about dyslexia is an important element of every teacher as they play a crucial part in educating, supporting students with dyslexia. Result stated that the lack of knowledge and awareness among teachers puts the affected students at significant difficulties.

Objectives

1. To study the perspectives of parents on online learning platforms for dyslexic students
2. To understand the difficulties faced by dyslexic students a normal school system.

3. To understand the teacher's observations about dyslexia in the present times.

Methodology

This study uses descriptive research design and primary data is collected through questionnaire and interview techniques. Samples of the study were the 40 parents of the dyslexic learners who were using online learning platforms and attending normal school at the same time. They were also asked about the difficulties faced by their children in school. Twenty school teachers were also part of the sample who gave valuable insights on their observations about dyslexia in contemporary times. The tools of data collection used in the study are:

1. Questionnaire.
2. Interview.

The questionnaire was created using Google forms and it was sent to the respondents through digital platforms such as WhatsApp application and Gmail. A semi-structured telephonic interview with open-ended questions was followed with the school teachers to gather information regarding their observations on students with learning difficulties in contemporary times.

Findings

The study was able to find that the dyslexic learners have interest in using the online learning platforms. 2.5% of the respondents have stated that their child refuses to use the online learning platform, a positive agreement (42.5%) was also received about the faster completion of work given through the online learning platform and 47.5% of the respondents stated that their child uses the platform even during holidays. These statements support the finding that dyslexic learners have interest in using the online learning platforms.

60% of the respondents agreed that their child uses the online learning platform alone which highlights the independent learning associated with online learning platforms.

All the respondents either agreed (82.5%) or had neutral opinion (17.5%) about their child showing more interest in visual games and exercises over normal paper works. 35% and 52.5% of the respondents strongly agreed and agreed respectively that the layout and visual illustrations help their child. Thus, visual games, colours, illustrations, layout etc were the most attractive features of the online learning platform.

Learners had a cordial relation with online tutors (85% of the respondents have stated the same). Parents were satisfied with the learning platform used by their child and mentioned that they would continue the usage. 82.5% of the respondents had a favourable attitude towards the continued use of online learning platforms by their children

Both teachers and parents mentioned that the dyslexic learners faced difficulty mostly in reading and writing. They took more time in completing the work and faced difficulty in copying notes from the board. 40% of the respondents stated that their child does not complete the classwork at school itself and 45% of the respondents mentioned that their child has difficulty in copying notes from the blackboard at school. Dyslexic learners did not have issues with their peers and maintained good relations with

teachers. On a whole, 55.51% of the respondents mentioned that their child maintains strong friendship bonds at school. Teachers mentioned that the lack of awareness and social stigma which is still associated with learning difficulties are the main obstacle for dyslexic learners. Time constraints and inclination towards traditional methods of education are the other factors mentioned by them.

Future scope of study

Studies can be done on the topic in future with a larger sample population. Rather than using a structured questionnaire, study in future can use modified questionnaires or any other data collection method like interviews or observation techniques. Samples can be the dyslexic learners itself, if possible. Sample should be using different online learning platforms also.

Recommendations about Online Learning Platforms

Every dyslexic learner has different difficulties and needs. The personalization of the online learning platforms according to their need will be an efficient step. The accessibility and affordability of online learning platforms are an issue. It should be accessible to everyone irrespective of the economic background which is a serious concern.

Recommendation for teachers

School teachers should have basic scientific knowledge about dyslexia and its symptoms. Teachers are highly recommended to undergo workshops or orientation classes on this topic which will enhance their knowledge.

Teachers should work along with parents and have them informed if any problem arises at the earliest. A combined effort of parents and teachers will lead to early identification and other related interventions. They should be able to identify and encourage learners so that they do not feel inferior about themselves and isolated.

They can introduce the learners to various assistive technologies and online learning platforms which can be used in classrooms and at home.

It is highly recommended to have a special educator in every school who is trained and capable enough to conduct early identification assessments and provide one-to-one attention.

Conclusion

From the analysis of the data, it was found that dyslexic learners, using online learning platforms parallels along with normal schooling, had favourable responses about online learning platforms. Learners were seen to have an interest in using the learning platform. The visual elements and the provision of independence can be assumed as the reasons contributing to this interest. It was stated that the users will continue to use the learning platform as they were satisfied with it.

Time constraints in a classroom setting hindered the dyslexic learners from having a one-to-one from the teachers. They were not able to copy the notes from the board and hence leads to incompleteness of notes. Students had friendly relations with teachers and peers. Teachers' lack of scientific knowledge about dyslexia also will impact the learning atmosphere of the learners.

Social stigma associated with dyslexia is slowly fading in society. Inclusive education is a necessary need of the hour as everyone has the right to learn and have a bright future.

Online learning platforms can be viewed as an external support system for the same.

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