



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

## The Teacher as a Partner in Supporting Students with Learning Difficulties: A Comprehensive Perspective

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: Sep 11, 2024 Accepted: Nov 18, 2024	Special education services encompass a diverse range of individuals with exceptional needs, including gifted individuals and those with learning difficulties. This has prompted researchers to focus on this group of individuals with special needs, aiming to identify their characteristics, diagnose their conditions, and explore suitable educational programs and strategies. Stemming from the significance of understanding this group, this study endeavors to answer the following questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What is the definition of learning difficulties?</li><li>• What are the primary characteristics of learning difficulties?</li><li>• What are the most important diagnostic criteria for learning difficulties?</li><li>• What are the fundamental principles that teachers should follow when addressing learning difficulties?</li></ul>
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### INTRODUCTION

Learning difficulties manifest when some students are unable to achieve the basic academic learning objectives upon which subsequent requirements are built, particularly in the fundamental learning skills of reading, writing, and arithmetic. Undoubtedly, these difficulties have far-reaching implications, affecting other subjects as well.

A student is considered to have learning difficulties if they consistently fail to grasp a concept, and the error persists despite receiving educational intervention.

The issue of learning difficulties begins as an educational problem but quickly evolves into psychological and social pressures that create disturbance and anxiety for the student, their family, the school, and the entire educational system.

Developmental psychological research has shown that each child has their unique pattern and individual timing for growth and development, as well as their own specific learning strategies and style.

Recognizing individual differences and the resulting variations in academic performance, on the one hand, and ensuring equal educational opportunities within the comprehensive process of teaching and learning, on the other, necessitates acknowledging that the presence of students with learning difficulties is a natural occurrence. However, what is unnatural is the failure to accurately diagnose these difficulties and for teachers to develop individualized plans to address them as they emerge, during what are known as critical periods for error correction. If errors accumulate and worsen, they become increasingly difficult to remedy.

Assessment is the key to identifying learning difficulties and the strengths and weaknesses in our teaching and learning practices. However, we have yet to fully utilize this tool. The forms of assessment currently employed often emphasize the punitive rather than the formative and remedial aspects, which are followed by an individualized treatment plan. Furthermore, assessment practices in our educational system are limited to the achievement-related aspect and do not address the entire growth and development process of learners (all aspects of personality).

### **The Problem Statement**

The field of learning difficulties is relatively new within the realm of special education. Previously, the focus of education was on other forms of disabilities such as intellectual, auditory, visual, and motor impairments. However, with the emergence of children who were neurologically, sensory, and motorically normal but experienced learning challenges, specialists began to concentrate on this group. The aim was to identify the manifestations of learning difficulties in these children, leading to learning difficulties becoming a significant area of interest for parents, educators, and researchers in the field of special education. Researchers in this field explore the distinctive characteristics of children with learning difficulties, the nature of these difficulties, and the most suitable intervention strategies and methods to mitigate these difficulties as much as possible.

From this perspective, research in special education, particularly in the education of individuals with special educational needs, has yielded two perspectives to explain learning difficulties. The adoption of either perspective has implications for the educational decisions made for the student.

One perspective attributes learning difficulties to the individual student, suggesting that the student's developmental characteristics are responsible for the emergence of these difficulties. Examples include disorders affecting cognitive processes such as attention, memory, and perception. These disorders negatively impact the functioning of these cognitive processes, making it difficult to retain symbols, form concepts, especially abstract concepts, and engage in generalization, discrimination, and problem-solving. Undoubtedly, these functions, among others, are closely linked to the ability to perceive letters and sounds (recognition, pronunciation, and writing), as well as mathematical symbols and the formation of number concepts and arithmetic operations.

The second perspective posits that learning difficulties primarily arise from the inflexibility of educational curricula that do not accommodate the individual characteristics of students. This perspective argues that the tasks, activities, resources, and psychological climate within the classroom, as well as the relationships between students as individuals and with the teacher, are

responsible for learning difficulties. In essence, the educational system, in its broadest sense, should adapt to the student, not the other way around (UNICEF, 2004).

## Research Objectives

This study aims to:

- Raise awareness about the concept of learning difficulties, their key characteristics, and the most important diagnostic criteria.
- Contribute to the accumulation of knowledge and provide a scientific foundation for further research in the field of learning difficulties.

## Importance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in the importance of the variable under investigation (learning difficulties). It:

- Draws the attention of parents and teachers to the problem of learning difficulties, their diagnosis, treatment, and management.
- The variable of learning difficulties is of paramount importance given its impact on students' academic achievement.
- Addressing the needs of this group of students with learning difficulties benefits them, their families, and our educational system.

## Defining the Field of Learning Difficulties

We have observed the developments that have contributed to the construction and structuring of the field of learning difficulties. While the term "learning disabilities" was introduced by Kirk in 1963 and was accepted by educators, parents, and specialists alike, the issue of definition remained unresolved until the 1990s, oscillating between clarity and ambiguity, agreement and disagreement. This naturally had implications for the components of this field, such as identifying its causes and factors, its objectives, and the issues of diagnosis and treatment programs. However, this development and the multiplicity of definitions have only made the matter clearer, as it has been subjected to more scrutiny and study. Cruikshank noted this when he stated that "no field in special education has required as much continuing effort to arrive at precise and definitive definitions as the field of learning disabilities" (1972).

Indeed, the concept of learning difficulties has been influenced by a variety of scientific disciplines, including neuroscience, psychology, and education. It is therefore a concept that has garnered the attention of numerous specialists, in addition to legislative bodies, parents, and educators. Hence, there have been numerous contributions to defining this concept in terms of its components, criteria, and underlying structures.

In the following sections, we will review a series of definitions, starting with Kirk's definition, the originator of the term, and progressing to the most specific and comprehensive definitions.

## 1. Kirk's Definition of Learning Disabilities

Kirk's definition of learning disabilities first appeared in his book on educating exceptional children in late 1962. He stated, "The term 'learning disabilities' refers to a retardation or disorder in one or more of the basic processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations. The term does not include children who have learning problems primarily because of visual, auditory, or motor handicaps, mental retardation, emotional disturbance, or environmental disadvantage." (Al-Sayed, 2000; Assaf, 2024)

It's notable that the definition is not limited to children and does not explicitly state that it applies to all age groups. Instead, it generalizes by stating, "The term 'learning disabilities' refers to a retardation or disorder in..." Additionally, the definition highlights the retardation or disorder in the area of basic academic skills without explicitly mentioning higher-order cognitive processes, although the term "basic processes" could be interpreted to include these. Furthermore, Kirk emphasizes that these difficulties are not caused by intellectual disability, sensory deprivation, cultural or educational factors.

## 2. Bateman's Definition (1965)

Bateman defines children with learning disabilities as those who exhibit a discrepancy between their general abilities and their actual achievement level. This discrepancy is manifested by disorders in the learning process, which may or may not be accompanied by overt central nervous system dysfunction. However, these learning disorders are not primarily due to intellectual disability, cultural or educational deprivation, severe emotional disturbance, or sensory deprivation (Smith & Nelsworth, 1975).

## Prevalence of Learning Disabilities

Despite the existence of numerous criteria for identifying individuals with learning disabilities, these criteria involve procedures that can narrow or broaden the scope of these disabilities. Given the specific nature of these difficulties, the use of different tests and the procedures for their application significantly influences the determination of the prevalence of learning disabilities. Some researchers use standardized achievement tests with normative standards for reading and math achievement, while others use tests of cognitive processes such as the WISC for psycholinguistic abilities and the Marianne Frostig test.

The lack of consensus on determining the prevalence of learning disabilities can be attributed to the tendency of diagnosticians and administrators to classify learning problems of typical students as learning disabilities. Additionally, there is a lack of specific procedural criteria that can be used to differentiate between the two groups. Without a defined criterion, definitions of learning disabilities are likely to remain subject to various interpretations. Thus, the strictness or flexibility of the criteria used can create disparities in prevalence estimates. Myers and Hammill (1990) support this, suggesting that the prevalence of learning disabilities, based on strict criteria, would be around 3%, but could be as high as 15% if a more flexible interpretation is used, and may even reach 30% (Al-shartawi and all., 2001; Jam et al., 2011).

There is evidence of an increasing prevalence of this phenomenon in public schools in the United States since the implementation of Public Law 94-142 in 1975. While only 1.8% of all students were

classified as having learning disabilities in that year, in the 1983-1984 school year, approximately two million children in the United States were classified as having learning disabilities, representing 4.57% of the total school population that year. This percentage reached 5.5% in the 1996-1997 school year. This increase in the prevalence of learning disabilities can be attributed to several factors, including increased awareness of learning disabilities, improved diagnostic and assessment methods, and societal acceptance of classifying a child as having a learning disability, preferring this classification over others. (Al-Wakfi, 2003)

References suggest that the ratio of boys to girls with learning disabilities is four to one. However, studies indicate that the ratio of boys to girls in this area is actually similar, but girls are often not diagnosed or classified as having learning disabilities. This is because many symptoms that manifest in boys, such as aggressive behavior, loss of self-control, and poor spelling, are less likely to appear in girls. Girls with learning disabilities tend to exhibit more cognitive, linguistic, and social problems, as well as difficulties in reading and mathematics. (Lyon, G. R., 1997)

### **Causes of Learning Disabilities**

Although research has not yet definitively concluded on the causes of learning disabilities, most studies suggest that a primary factor is damage to the child's brain during pregnancy. For example, a study by Strauss and Lenten showed that brain damage that occurs before, during, or after birth can cause various disabilities such as learning disabilities, cerebral palsy, intellectual disabilities, and many other physical abnormalities.

Kirk added that learning disabilities stem from a neuropsychological deficit in the individual, resulting in a severe impairment in the use of spoken or written language, or due to weaknesses in perception, understanding, memory, or motor skills.

Among the overall causes of learning disabilities are:

#### **A. Individual Factors:**

These are factors related to the individual from their conception, upbringing, and development of physical characteristics, mental abilities, and personality traits. They can be summarized as follows:

- **Organic and Biological Factors:** It is possible that learning difficulties experienced by an individual, such as difficulty concentrating due to attention deficit, are due to brain damage, problems with blood circulation, or abnormal chemical processes in the body that affect the nervous system of the fetus during pregnancy. Other important factors include meningitis, encephalitis, German measles, oxygen deprivation, birth difficulties, premature birth, and drug use. (Tasir m.kawafih, 2003, p. 106). This is supported by proponents of the single-factor theory, where many scientists consider various and different factors as the cause of children's inability to learn. Orton (1928) and Delacato (1963) believe that the inability to learn is due to what is known as a lack of brain control. Strauss and Lehtinen argue that mild brain damage is the underlying defect in the inability to learn, while Smith and Carrigan (1959) suggest that the inability to learn is due to hormonal imbalances and biochemical disturbances in the body.
- **Genetic Factors:** Studies of families of children with learning disabilities have shown that such problems are prevalent among these families. (Nabil Abdel Fattah Hafez, 2000, p. 177). Recent studies on learning disabilities also point to the influence of genetic factors. Orton's study of twins indicated the prevalence of learning disabilities within certain families. Ouen's study in

1971 also indicated that the prevalence of learning disabilities exists among specific families. Studies conducted on families and twins have shown that the significant factor in the occurrence of the difficulty is due to genetic factors. It is estimated that 25% to 40% of children suffer from difficulties that have been passed down through genetics, and siblings within a family may experience similar difficulties. This may also be found in uncles, aunts, cousins, or their children. (Tasir Muhammad Kawafih, 2003, p. 106).

## Environmental Factors

These are factors related to the environment in which the child grows and develops. The most prominent manifestations are:

1. **Biological Environment (Uterus):** In this environment, the child grows from fertilization until birth. Negative factors affecting their growth include maternal malnutrition, lack of physical, psychological, and social care for the mother, and maternal diseases such as syphilis and German measles, as well as the use of drugs or alcohol without medical supervision. All of these factors can hinder the child's normal development and acquisition of educational experiences later.
2. **Social or Cultural Environment:** This is represented by different environments with diverse cultures that can stimulate or hinder an individual's learning.
  - **Family:** This is the environment in which the individual is raised and influences the child's development through several aspects:
  - **Family Size:** Sweif (1968) found that the larger the family size, the more negatively it affects the child's academic achievement. This is attributed to the limited ability of parents to supervise and follow up with a large number of children.
  - **Family Structure:** A complete family, including both parents and children, is better equipped to raise, educate, and monitor the academic progress of its children compared to a dysfunctional family characterized by quarrels, separation, divorce, the absence of one or both parents, or the death of one or both parents. This often leads to psychological and social problems, a sense of insecurity in children, and a lack of follow-up and supervision of their psychological and academic development.
  - **Socioeconomic and Cultural Level of the Family:** It has been proven by psychologists, educators, and sociologists that a low socioeconomic and cultural level of the family does not provide the child with sufficient educational stimuli and resources to help develop their personality. This can lead to cultural deprivation, which hinders the development of children's intellectual abilities.
  - The cultural level of the family also plays a significant role in educational methods, which may rely on harshness and physical punishment or persuasion and the use of moral punishment. The latter approach is often more effective in teaching children and developing their behavior. (Nabil Abdel fatah hafid, 2000, p. 10).

## 2. B. School:

There is no doubt that the school plays a major role in the increase or decrease of students' academic achievement, as it is technically and officially responsible for students' acquisition of the prescribed curricula. It plays this important role through the extent to which curricula and programs suit students' abilities, interests, attitudes, and personality traits. Additionally, the sufficiency, diversity, and efficiency of using books and educational materials are crucial. Furthermore, the teacher's personality, scientific and educational preparation, attitude towards their profession, and the extent

to which it satisfies their material, professional, social, and personal aspirations, undoubtedly hinder their performance with students, thus affecting their achievement level.

Moreover, the type of school administration and the school climate, whether democratic or authoritarian, or characterized by strictness or laxity, also play a significant role. Similarly, the assessment and examination system, whether continuous or at the end of the year, comprehensive or partial, flexible or rigid, and the types of abilities it assesses, are all important factors. (Nabil Abdel Fattah hafid, 2000)

All of these environmental factors are considered causes of learning difficulties, according to Nabil Abdel Fattah Hafez. This is supported by theories that focus on learning conditions, as proponents of this approach believe that many environmental factors contribute to creating learning disorders in typical children or exacerbating existing weaknesses. Among the most important environmental factors that can contribute to learning difficulties are inadequate nutrition, insufficient counseling, socioeconomic and cultural differences, an inappropriate emotional climate, environmental toxins, and ineffective teaching.

In this context, Smith and Nelsworth, after examining over 20,000 books and articles on learning disabilities, identified a large number of causes and found many contradictory theories in this regard. There are medical perspectives that provide numerous causes, as well as non-neurological explanations that focus on causes other than those emphasized by the first explanations or perspectives. This led Smith and Nelsworth to attempt to understand the reason for the significant disagreement regarding the organic and neurological causes of learning disabilities and the lack of consensus on this matter. Hence, some have sought to achieve a practical and procedural understanding.

Therefore, some have argued that there are many non-organic factors that can contribute to learning disabilities, including:

1. Ineffective teaching
2. Inappropriateness of curricula
3. Lack of motivation
4. Deficiency in the level of structure required for the educational program

Smith and Nelsworth point out that this perspective leads to several noteworthy points:

- This perspective attributes the causes of failure or inability to learn to educators rather than to the child.
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However, we believe that the view of Smith, Nelsworth, and others, who attribute the causes of learning difficulties to environmental factors of any kind, does not align with the comprehensive definition of Abdel-Matalb El-qriti, nor does it align with the nature of the field of learning disabilities. If this perspective were correct, what would be the difference between the category of learning disabilities and the category of underachievers or underachievers? Furthermore, a study of the nature of the concept of learning disabilities supports our perspective, based on the agreement of most definitions of learning disabilities that the cause of the difficulty lies internally rather than externally.

Those who argue that the cause of learning disabilities is external have confused the concept of learning disabilities with other learning concepts, such as the concept of academic underachievement.

### Characteristics of Students with Learning Disabilities

A consensus has emerged regarding several common characteristics of children with learning disabilities, which can be used as diagnostic indicators. These include:

1. **Distractibility:** Children with learning disabilities exhibit a tendency to be easily distracted, as they can be easily drawn to different stimuli. This behavior is closely linked to a short attention span, as children with learning disabilities cannot focus their attention for extended periods.
2. **Auditory Processing Disorder:** These children often have difficulty processing auditory information. They may struggle to discriminate between sounds, associate sounds with their sources, and provide appropriate responses, leading to embarrassing situations and hindering their adaptation.
3. **Visual Perception Disorder:** Children with learning disabilities may have difficulty distinguishing between letters, perceiving them as a group of similar shapes. This hinders their ability to perform tasks related to letter discrimination, word formation, and reading.
4. **Reversal of Letters and Numbers:** These children often reverse letters and numbers, impairing their ability to manipulate numbers and letters in their correct positions.
5. **Poor Memory:** They may struggle to remember information, such as the main idea of a story, the sequence of events, or basic facts. They may omit, add, or substitute words.
6. **Social Skills Deficits:** These children often lack social interaction skills and are more isolated and withdrawn. They may have difficulty making friends and being accepted by peers.
7. **Spatial Awareness Difficulties:** They may struggle with understanding directions, locations, and spatial relationships (e.g., left, right, above, below). This can lead to difficulties following instructions.
8. **Lower-Level Thinking:** Many of these children exhibit lower-level thinking skills, often due to limited sensory experiences. This can hinder their ability to make inferences, understand cause-and-effect relationships, and solve problems.
9. **Overreliance on Enactive Representation:** These children may rely heavily on concrete experiences and struggle with abstract concepts. They often need to manipulate objects to understand them, leading to difficulties in problem-solving.
10. **Hyperactivity:** Excessive energy levels can interfere with a child's ability to focus on tasks and persist in activities, leading to academic difficulties.
11. **Poor Social Adjustment:** These children may struggle to adapt to their environment, both in the classroom and in social situations.
12. **Difficulty with Classification and Mathematical Concepts:** They may have trouble categorizing objects, understanding mathematical language, and using mathematical operations.

(Naifa Qatami, 1992/205/211; Jamal Al-Khateeb, Mona Al-Hadidi, 1994, 34, 36; Ghaim Jasir Al-Bastami, 1995, 167; Fathi Al-Seid Eid Al-Rahim, 1990, 23, 25)



## Criteria for Learning Disabilities

There are specific criteria that can be used to determine the presence of a learning disability in an individual. These criteria can be derived from the definitions provided for learning disabilities. They can be identified as follows:

**Discrepancy Criterion:** This criterion is one of the indicators proposed by Bateman for the existence of a learning disability. The discrepancy can manifest in two ways: First, the discrepancy may exist between the individual's different abilities. For example, a child may be average or excellent in mathematical ability but not in reading ability. They may have strong auditory perception or auditory memory but be weak in visual perception or visual memory. Second, the discrepancy may exist between general or underlying intellectual ability and actual performance or achievement in a specific area of achievement or development. As a result, there may be a decline in language acquisition, spelling, listening comprehension, reading comprehension, reading, or mathematics, even though the student may have exceptional abilities in other areas. However, their growth pattern is irregular. The discrepancy can be mild or severe, and the degree of discrepancy affects the identification of individuals with learning disabilities and the provision of therapeutic services. Additionally, the discrepancy criterion between underlying intellectual ability and achievement ability is used in the school setting, while reliance on developmental skills or delays in one or more psychological processes such as attention, perception, and spelling is used in preschool age. It can also be used in later years when accompanied by a decrease in academic abilities in school.

Calculating the discrepancy depends on: (1) determining the percentage of discrepancy by which the expected achievement deviates from the individual's intellectual abilities, and (2) determining the number of grade levels the student falls behind their current grade level. Regarding the determination of the percentage of discrepancy, school systems set a percentage or standard deviation for the deviation of achievement from intelligence to classify a student as having a learning disability. For example, the state of New York suggested a 50% discrepancy between ability and achievement to classify a student as having a learning disability. This means that the student's achievement does not exceed half of what is generally expected of the average student, indicating that the student is at least one year behind in their expected achievement in reading, math, and other areas. As for determining the number of grade levels, educators calculate it by the number of grades the student is behind what is expected of them. Typically, a one-year criterion is used for the first three grades, and two years for the fourth grade and above. (Al-Sartawi, Al-Sartawi, et al., 2001)

**Exclusion Criterion:** This criterion involves excluding all possible causes that could contribute to the learning difficulty, such as sensory impairments in hearing or vision, intellectual disability, emotional or behavioral disorders, and environmental, cultural, and economic deprivation. The primary reason is the irregularity in the developmental trajectory, which in turn is due to a minor brain dysfunction. However, the principle of exclusion, according to the definition of learning disabilities provided by the Joint National Committee (see previous definition), which includes the possibility of learning disabilities co-occurring with these possibilities; i.e., the presence of sensory impairment or intellectual disability, along with learning disabilities, implies that many intellectually disabled, behaviorally disturbed, and physically disabled children may experience irregularities in developmental areas that are not attributable to their intellectual, behavioral, or sensory disability. They may exhibit lower achievement than expected, and this is not due to their existing disability but to irregularities in developmental areas. For example, a blind student who lost the ability to speak or read Braille after a brain tumor removal may experience difficulty learning. In this case, there is no causal relationship between this learning difficulty and blindness. A behaviorally disturbed student may fall behind due to a lack of attention compared to what is expected for their age and intelligence

in learning necessary language skills, and this delay is due to a difficulty in attention rather than a behavioral disorder. Similarly, environmental, cultural, and economic deprivation have been excluded as primary factors in judging learning disabilities, although some children from low-income families are at a higher risk of academic failure compared to other children. The fact remains that, regardless of whether a child has low socioeconomic and cultural conditions or is classified as having a learning disability, the result is the same: a deficit in information processing that hinders learning. Therefore, many approaches believe that environmental factors and socioeconomic and cultural deprivation can indirectly lead to learning difficulties.

### 3. Special Education Criterion:

Children with learning disabilities are those who require specialized teaching methods designed specifically to address their challenges. A child who has difficulty learning an academic skill such as reading, math, or a skill related to attention, auditory or visual perception, or touch needs special education and an individualized plan to develop their abilities in that particular area. This means that children with learning disabilities cannot benefit from regular classroom instruction unless the usual educational programs or procedures are modified, especially in the areas of reading, math, and writing.

These criteria are mentioned in most references, although the criteria can be more extensive. They can be derived from the fifth definition of learning disabilities. Therefore, other criteria can be added, such as slow learning, academic underachievement, lack of metacognitive awareness, emotional and social problems, and attention and hyperactivity disorders (Al-Waqfi, 2003).

**Basic Principles for Teaching Students with Learning Disabilities:** In this section, we will present some guidelines and principles that are used as a basis for providing assistance to a child with a learning disability, regardless of the type of educational system. The following is a presentation of these guidelines, followed by a set of specific strategies that may be effective with a child with learning difficulties, depending on their specific needs and the variables surrounding the learning situation.

It is important to remember that the concept of "learning disability" is broad and includes different groups of children whose difficulties have varying causes. Therefore, they have different treatment needs. The following principles are general in nature and do not represent specific methods. Their generality provides a flexible framework that can benefit teachers of children with intellectual disabilities and learning disabilities. Undoubtedly, they benefit both special education teachers and regular classroom teachers working with these groups of children. The following are the most important of these principles:

1. **There is no single successful method that can be used with all children with learning disabilities:** Children who are referred to special education programs for students with learning disabilities often find it difficult to benefit effectively from regular programs for typical children. There is a variety of teaching methods that may achieve their goals with varying degrees of success with these children, but it is certain that there is no single method that can be effective in all cases. In all cases, and at best, there will be a certain percentage who do not benefit from a particular method. In most cases, it is necessary to use more than one method, and the teacher must vary the levels of presentation of the learning material. The best method is one that is planned based on careful observation of the student's performance and how they learn effectively.

The most important factor in planning all activities is the flexibility of the human being in the learning situation - the child - who can learn even if we fail to provide appropriate opportunities. We have no doubt that a teacher who realizes that they are teaching a deaf student will not focus on auditory inputs in teaching. However, many teachers may continue to use a method that focuses on auditory sounds with children who do not have the ability to discriminate between the sounds the teacher uses. A child may hear a sound from others, but they may not be able to distinguish between some sounds that may be different but similar. The same applies to a child with a visual impairment who cannot accurately distinguish between certain letters, and therefore does not perform well in a method that relies primarily on visual recognition. It is unreasonable to imagine that there is one correct way to teach students with learning disabilities, as this is against common sense and is based on a misunderstanding of the nature of this disability. We cannot, through the available assessment tools, accurately determine how to treat each case. However, we can avoid believing in a single method and try to use a number of methods and approaches, especially with complex cases.

## **2. Always Use a New Approach for the Child When All Other Factors Are Equal:**

When gathering information about a child's educational background, the teacher should make every effort to determine which methods and programs have been used with the child. Undoubtedly, the analysis of this information can have many applications. If it turns out that the use of certain methods has not achieved the desired success, this may reveal their inadequacy or may reveal deficiencies in implementation, or that the student did not have the necessary prerequisites to benefit from the program.

There is another important point that may be overlooked, and that is that many of these children tend to develop what is called the "failure syndrome" after repeated attempts on their part to complete a task, yet they face repeated failures. In the case of reading difficulties, the teacher will feel the need to continue trying to help the child learn to read or to read more effectively, but the teacher must make a serious and deliberate attempt to use a new approach that the child perceives as new. Since the problem is difficult and chronic, the more the feeling of helplessness settles in the child's mind, the more necessary it becomes for the teacher to resort to a new method. This principle states that when there are many possible methods available to the teacher, and when all other factors are equal, a different approach (compared to what has been used) becomes the most effective approach and the first to be applied with the child.

## **3. Reconstructing Positive Associations with New Learning Situations:**

Pioneers in the field of learning disabilities, such as Gerhardt and Fernald (1983), emphasize the importance of this principle. The rule of using the newest method is part of the principle of reconstructing positive conditioning. We must also instill in the child a deep feeling that their inability to learn to read or do math is not their fault, but rather the result of the school and teachers' failure to identify appropriate methods. The direct goal of this is to convince the child that they are a normal and healthy child, to support their self-concept and self-confidence, and to maximize their chances of success. Numerous studies have addressed the devastating effects of a child feeling that they cannot succeed or learn how to succeed. Unfortunately, most school systems are designed in a way that makes children with learning disabilities feel like failures all the time. Studies that have examined the effects of positive reconditioning have confirmed the positive impact on the performance of these children. However, the experiences of many educators working in the field of learning disabilities confirm with simple logic that success is a goal that must be planned for.

#### **4. High Motivation is a Primary Requirement for Success, and Careful Planning of Emotional Aspects is Vital:**

Although motivation is a clear factor, there is a deficiency in its utilization and maximizing its role. Motivation is also difficult to measure and seems non-essential, except in some specific situations involving behavior modification. The previous two principles (numbers 2 and 3) are part of an attempt to maximize the impact of motivation. In the case of older children who have developed the basic learning skills necessary for academic success but have developed these skills a few years late, a motivation development program becomes the most effective and procedural approach. The fact that the widespread use of behavior modification techniques successfully confirms the validity of this principle. This principle emphasizes the need for a type of planning for the emotional aspects of the individual and using them effectively in educational situations. We must consider how the child feels about themselves in relation to the outside world and about their own feelings in light of the effort they exert in school to achieve their goals.

#### **5. Acknowledging Unspecified or Difficult-to-Define Problems in Learning Disabilities:**

Undoubtedly, some children with learning disabilities have clear emotional difficulties, and for such children, the best solution is to plan to confront or treat these difficulties. Many other initiatives undoubtedly have a positive impact on addressing such psychological difficulties, such as improving low self-esteem, as improving a child's academic performance has a therapeutic effect in overcoming difficulties. However, what should not be overlooked is that, regardless of the positive effects we have mentioned, the emotional component of personality plays a significant role in the learning process for children with learning disabilities, and it must be considered in any diagnostic or assessment process involving individuals in this category.

There are often educational problems in reading or math that can be identified, but the situation is different when it comes to an older child who has experienced a severe visual problem at an early age. Even if they manage to develop some of the visual perception skills necessary for reading success at the age of 6 or 7, albeit late, it becomes difficult to accurately identify their learning difficulties. All that can be observed is a general academic delay, and in many cases, a negative attitude towards school. In this case, what the child needs is to develop some reading skills specific to the second or third grade, even though they are now 15 years old and have been a student with whom several attempts have been made to overcome their reading difficulties. Some experts prefer to describe learning disabilities as specific difficulties that can be precisely identified and diagnosed. Therefore, in the previous case, there is no clear learning difficulty, but rather a case of general academic delay. However, we consider it a special case of learning disabilities, and it requires a delicate and conscious approach in planning for it.

#### **6. Having Complete and Accurate Information About a Student's Strengths and Weaknesses is Vital:**

Educational planning for a child with learning difficulties must be based on up-to-date, accurate, and complete data so that it can be determined which areas require increased treatment efforts and which abilities can be used as an entry point for addressing weaknesses. An accurate assessment of strengths highlights the healthy abilities that can be used in future attempts to teach academic content or enhance specific skills and concepts. Achieving this principle requires us to not use a single tool to identify strengths or weaknesses in the student. Even if we use two or more tools or methods, we must make every effort to use at least two tools to confirm the existence of a specific deficiency

in performance. This principle also states that when we discover a problem in one area, we should not automatically assume that this deficiency is the main reason for academic delay.

For example, we often find in many situations that those who criticize programs in the field of learning disabilities are mostly dominated by the idea that the main cause is visual perception problems. Therefore, most of the activities of therapeutic programs are biased towards this direction. The reason for this is that they have interpreted everything in light of this type of problem.

The principle of the completeness and accuracy of information requires a comprehensive study of all possible causes, as well as the completion of historical data about the case. The existence of positive trends on the part of those who interpret this data and the non-acceptance of the first evidence of the problem as a final explanation also means the continuation of evaluation, achieving a schedule, and re-evaluation.

### **7. The presence of symptoms associated with learning difficulties does not necessarily mean the presence of a learning difficulty, nor does it allow for its prediction:**

One of the most common learning difficulties listed for years is dyslexia or reading disorder. There are many definitions for it, and dyslexia always indicates a severe difficulty in reading accompanied by problems in visual perception, along with problems in writing such as reversing letters or words, which is what is known as the "mirror writing" phenomenon. We find almost all of these symptoms associated with dyslexia regularly in children who have been medically diagnosed with brain injuries, and who belong to programs for children with severe learning disabilities.

Reversing letters and words has become strongly associated with some cases of learning disabilities, and has even become a means of predicting it in the future if it exists. Such predictions may be possible, but they are often exaggerated and may not be accurate at all. This can be illustrated by a practical example of a child about 5 years old, approximately at preschool age, whose parents were concerned about his performance when he enrolled in any educational program. An individual intelligence test and other tools were applied to help predict his academic success. His case revealed that he had two things:

1. He reversed some letters and words when writing his name.
2. His motor skills were weak. These two results reflect the most important manifestations of potential learning difficulties for this case. However, the matter was completely different after he enrolled in school, where the following observations were recorded about his case:
3. He reads well and understands well at a level close to the third grade.
4. His IQ is 150.
5. Although he can spell well if asked to write words - due to motor difficulties - he can spell easily if asked to do so verbally.

### **SUMMARY:**

Learning difficulties represent a significant field in the realm of special education, sparking considerable debate within educational and psychological circles. Perspectives have varied widely, ranging from definitions of learning disabilities and the characteristics of students with learning disabilities to diagnostic criteria and the principles of diagnosing learning disabilities. This diversity is a clear indication of the breadth and complexity of the field. This can only be achieved through the teacher's application of the following pedagogical principles:

- **Individualized learning:** A unique educational plan is developed for each child, taking into account their weaknesses, strengths, language proficiency, reading skills, spoken and written vocabulary, intelligence level, emotional maturity, and educational history. The program must be specifically tailored to the child.
- **Teaching according to different readiness levels:** The teacher should not only consider one aspect of readiness but should take into account all aspects of readiness.
- **Considering frustration tolerance:** It should be expected that increased psychological stress is a possibility in cases of learning difficulties, and that some types of stimuli may be distracting, and that levels of frustration tolerance, both neurological and psychological, are usually unusual. This should be taken into consideration when planning any educational step.
- **Considering multiple inputs:** Sensory, visual, auditory, and kinesthetic stimuli should be used, but they should be considered in light of frustration tolerance levels and the level of psychological burden on the child's mind.
- **The educational plan should not be limited to addressing deficiencies and weaknesses.** Teaching that is limited to areas of weakness is a limited and unacceptable approach in light of the diverse results of studies.
- **Attention to both verbal and non-verbal learning:** This means that the focus should be on the verbal components of the learning problem while planning the effort to link the two aspects and combine them.

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