CHAPTER I

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“If students cannot learn the way we teach them, then we must teach them the way they learn.”

Learning has often been defined as the process by which experience or practice results in a relatively permanent change in behavior or potential behavior. It is the acquisition and development of memories and behaviors, including skills, knowledge, understanding, values, and wisdom. It is the goal of education, and the product of experience. The *Oxford dictionary (2001)* gives three meanings of ‘learning’ (as a noun):

- The act, process, or experience of gaining knowledge or skill.
- Knowledge or skill gained through schooling or study.
- Behavioural modification especially through experience or conditioning.

In terms of physiology of learning, current understanding (research is ongoing in this area) of neurons and the central nervous system implies that the process of learning corresponds to changes in the relationship between certain neurons in the brain. “Thought”, in a general sense, is commonly conceived as something arising from the stimulation of neurons in the brain.

Generally, however, it is recognized that learning and thereafter the retention of memory comes easier when multiple parts of the brain (such as hearing, seeing, smelling, motor skills, touch sense, and logical thinking lobes) are stimulated. Therefore, it is the prime responsibility of the teacher that – in order to be an effective teacher and to bring about effective learning among students – the teacher should stimulate the senses of the students.

Learning plays very important role in determining the behavior of an individual. Almost all human behavior can be traced back to learning. The miracles of the present day civilization are the result of learning. That is why learning occupies the prime place in the field of education.
Learning is a relatively enduring change in behavior which is a function of prior behavior (usually called practice) and excludes the changes due to illness, fatigue, maturation and use of drugs or intoxicants. It is not directly observable but manifests itself in the activities of the individual.

It is prime responsibility of the educator to ensure that the problem grows out of the conditions of the experience learner is going through and that it is within the range of the capacity of the learner. Also, it must be ensured that learning situation arouses in the learner an active quest for information and for production of new ideas. The new facts and new ideas thus obtained become the ground for further experiences in which new problems are presented.

Further, students learn best when they are properly motivated for learning. There is no force equivalent to self-motivation and it has the capacity to surmount any obstacle. However, if students are not self-motivated, to begin with external motivation can prove to be equally rewarding. Only teacher is at the vantage point from where he/she may lead learning in any direction though the individual differences among students may hamper the teacher’s progress in effective teaching.

No doubt that all children, except the very small minority with obvious functional defects, whatever their social, cultural and economic background, are born with precisely the same basic learning process for comprehending and predicting the world, just as all children tend to have the same complements of heads, arms and legs.

Despite this sameness in fundamental equipment, however, the diversity of human beings is enormous. All people seem to have different interests, different funds of knowledge, different skills, different attitudes and different motivations towards goals for different reasons. They learn different things at different times with different degrees of facility and different personal involvement in the different outcomes. They make sense of the world in characteristically individual ways.

Though our basic elements are the same, yet they tend to go together in different combinations and proportions. All individuals differ along a number of dimensions – some are happy and others are sad, some are cheerful and others are morbid, some gregarious and others reclusive. Individuals also differ in the
characteristic manner in which they approach problems even though they employ the same basic processes.

The truth, basically, is that we are alike in some ways and different in others. Education plays a vital role in giving human beings proper equipment to lead a purposeful, gracious and harmonious life. In order to proceed towards the attainment of the goals of education, an individual must engage him-/her-self in a variety of intellectual activities called “learning”. No doubt that in the present times, there are many means of accessing and acquiring knowledge, yet teacher in the classroom remains indispensable. In order to remain indispensable a teacher has to plan his/her teaching accordingly so that optimum learning takes place.

“Knowledge is power” – every research work done, irrespective of the subject and the area, is validating and consolidating this statement. The teacher’s primary concern is learning, the stimulation of which is a complicated process and involves a wide range of activities. Regrettably teaching and learning are not necessarily related, because it is the learner’s psychological mechanisms that primarily determine the nature of what is learnt and/or retained rather than the act of teaching itself.

In a normal and traditional classroom situation, all students are required to learn the same thing, at the same time, to the same extent and in the same way. Since learners differ from one another in ability, pacing, achievement, interests, learning styles, thinking styles, study habits, self-esteem, etc, their dependence on the same teacher seriously affects the academic progress of most of them.

Everyday teachers enter their classrooms with lesson plans, experience, expertise and the hope that what they are about to present to the class will be understood, remembered and will be useful to the students. The extent to which this hope is realized depends largely on the knowledge base that these teachers use in designing their lesson plans and, perhaps more importantly, on the instructional techniques they select while teaching, which have to be considered keeping in view the individual differences. Also, to a very considerable extent, learning depends on the experience and background of the learner. An understanding of these factors and the use of procedures based on this understanding make the teacher’s task easier.
As mentioned earlier, individuals are all alike in some ways and differ in others. The children in a class are approximately of same age and have almost a common level of knowledge fund, but, they differ significantly in their likings, behaviors, habits, preferences, etc. The reasons for such differences are beyond comprehension and can be safely attributed to the genetic constituents and the complex brain structure.

Learning disability is one such factor which distinguishes some children as ‘special/exceptional’ from the rest. No area of special education has experienced as much rapid growth, extreme interest, and frantic activity as learning disabilities. The increasing interest may be due to the increase in the number of children identified as suffering from learning disabilities, making this category one of the largest in special education. The increase has fueled the ongoing debate among professionals over the very nature of the concept of learning disabilities.

For some children with normal intelligence, learning is a struggle. In the words of Hammill (1990), these youngsters have a learning disability, which refers to a child who (a) has difficulty mastering an academic subject, (b) has normal intelligence, and (c) is not suffering from other conditions that could explain poor performance, such as sensory impairment or inadequate instruction.

Learning disability is much misunderstood and rarely detected, thereby leading to bare minimal corrective action. Each child with learning disability is different and unique – the result of a combination of factors, some of them being genetical and environmental influences or unsuccessful learning experiences. What goes undetected besides the disability is the underlying talent, creativity, curiosity, intuitive ability, visual and multi-dimensional thinking of the individual.

The variety of learning disabilities complicates the task for teachers and researchers because it suggests that each type of learning disability may have its own cause and treatment. The number of distinct disabilities and the degree of overlap among them is debatable (Stanovich, 1993). However, one common classification scheme distinguishes disability in language (including listening, speaking, and writing), in reading, and in arithmetic (Dockrell & McShane, 1993).
Learning disabilities is a young field and its history is largely one of the past very few decades. During the past few years there has been a direct, face-to-face confrontation with learning disabilities under a number of different guises and in several different contexts. Essentially, all of the relevant history of learning disabilities took place within the twentieth century. In the late 1920s and 1930s, some apparently independent events were producing ideas and data that were to provide important contributions to the nascent field of learning disability. The early 1960s witnessed the frustration of teachers and clinicians, who recognised the distinctive problems and the needs of the children suffering from learning disabilities, but found little help or guidance either in theory or applied techniques. Though, in the subsequent years, there was some progress made through a number of research experiences which tried to discriminate the fact from fiction and perceived some order in chaos.

Orton – a neurologist – in 1937 studied the problems of children with developmental language difficulties.

Goldstein (1942) conducted clinical studies on soldiers suffering from head wounds to study the behaviors peculiar to those with the history of brain lesions.

It was Kirk (1963) who coined the term ‘learning disability’ despite the fact that he was very much against the labels or the tags. He gave the first specific definition of learning disabilities in 1962 in a college text book dealing with special education which gained wide acceptance and became most often cited definition.

Johnson & Myklebust (1967) developed theories on language, reading, writing, arithmetic and non-verbal disorders.

By 1980s it was clear that learning disabilities are not unitary disorders, in fact, the causes and characteristics of learning disabilities are so varied that these differ from person to person.

Today, teachers have an uphill task of taking along all the students despite the individual differences. Teachers try to change the human brain every day, day after day. If they know more about how it learns, they can be more successful in their endeavors. In the words of Moats & Lyon (1993), the key to helping these children is to move beyond the generic label “learning disability” to pinpoint specific cognitive
and academic deficits that hamper an individual child’s performance in school. Then instruction can be specifically tailored to improve the child’s skills.

Learning disability – in one or the other form – occurs among all groups, regardless of age, race and income (International Dyslexia Association, 1999). Many successful people are dyslexic and many dyslexic people are successful.

In the words of De Fonseca et al (2004) the achievement goals have become an important concept to address achievement motivation in school settings. Children with learning disabilities find it difficult to keep pace with the present day cut-throat competition. However, it has been established that students with learning disabilities may be benefited through school-based interventions (Elbaum & Vaughn, 2003).

Now it is time to focus on strengths of learning disabled children and effort should be made to help them realize their distinctive potential (West, 1998).

Individuals diagnosed with learning disabilities are likely to experience more adjustment difficulties compared to those without learning disabilities. Compared to their non-learning disabled peers, learning disabled children experience significant difficulties in relation to academic, career, and interpersonal problems, along with substance abuse, suicide ideation, and depression (Saghatoleslami, 2005).

O’Brien (2006) reported that learning disabled differed significantly from their non-learning disabled counterparts on measures of verbal comprehension, perceptual reasoning, auditory working memory, reading comprehension, numerical operations, math reasoning, spelling, written expression, listening comprehension, overall reading, overall math skills, overall written language skills, short-term auditory memory for numbers, auditory interpretation of directions, auditory processing, anxiety / shyness, perfectionism, social problems, and emotional liability. They also differed on cognitive ability, achievement, perceptual skills and behaviour.

If a teacher is aware of such differences, he/she may be better prepared to take on the responsibilities associated with handling children with learning disabilities and turn the entire learning process into a more rewarding and profitable enterprise. Therefore, extensive research in the area of learning disabilities is the need of the hour in order to better understand learning disabled persons and their problems.
The present study is an effort to provide the knowledge base to teachers for making decisions regarding instructional techniques to be employed; to parents and psychologists; etc. The study was so planned and conducted as to get a more comprehensive understanding of the characteristic behavioral differentials of children suffering with learning disabilities and normal children. The researcher in the present study has concentrated on the achievement motivation; styles of learning; styles of thinking; self esteem and study habits as characteristic behavioural.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The present research work aimed at studying the behavioural characteristics – which included achievement motivation (n-Ach), styles of learning (SL), styles of thinking (ST), self-esteem (SE) and study habits (SH) – so as to identify in what respect children having learning disabilities (LD) differ from the normal children (NC). The statement of the problem, therefore, reads as:-

“Characteristic behavioural differentials of learning disabled and normal children across levels of intelligence”.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study was planned and designed to achieve the following objectives:-

• To find out the incidence of 5th grade children having learning disabilities (LD).

• To study the characteristic behavioural differentials between learning disabled children (LD) and normal children (NC) across levels of intelligence.

• To study the characteristic behavioural differentials among learning disabled children (LD) across levels of intelligence.

• To study the characteristic behavioural differentials among learning disabled children (LD) at the same level of intelligence.

• To study the characteristic behavioural differentials among normal children (NC) across levels of intelligence.

• To study the characteristic behavioural differentials among normal children (NC) at the same level of intelligence.
• To study the gender differentials on behavioural characteristics of learning disabled children (LD) and normal children (NC).
• To study the academic achievement differentials of learning disabled children (LD) and normal children (NC).
• To study the correlates of intelligence; academic achievement; achievement motivation; styles of learning; styles of thinking; self-esteem and study habits.