Summary

&

CONCLUSIONS
Chapter 6

1. Summary

2. Conclusions
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Summary:

The probability of the plight of the fate of children with learning difficulties going through severe life problems, lack of identification and intervention, lack of research and a full test battery to identify the issues involved with such individuals encouraged this present study to be possible.

This study had four groups of participants’ i.e., children with learning difficulties at 4th grade level, children with no learning difficulties at 4th grade level, children with learning difficulties at 7th grade level and children with no learning difficulties at 7th grade level.

There were totally 120 participants, 30 in each group. These groups were selected from two similar types of convent schools from the same demographic area with English as the medium of education.

The screening of these groups were carried out with a set of screening tools namely 1. Ravens progressive matrices RCPM, for the 4th graders and RPM for the 7th graders. 2. Rutter’s Proforma A and B (Rutter, 1967) 3. Socio-economic status scale (Bina Shah, 1986) 4. The class monthly test progress record. Based on the measures of the tools the children were selected for the different groups. The operational definition adopted in the present study was as follows –

‘Learning Difficulties’ is a condition where in the children perform poorly, currently failing in at least 3 subjects consecutively for a period of six months, and having academic underachievement, in spite of having adequate intelligence, adequate schooling
and learning environment, coming from middle to upper middle socio-economic family background, without severe emotional disturbance, no general impairment of speech, language and demonstrable neurological or psychiatric conditions.

The assessment was carried out individually with a battery of selected tools. All four groups, the LD and NLD groups from 4th grade and 7th grade levels were assessed on parameters, which included cognitive, scholastic and socio-emotional functions.

The results obtained were tabulated and proper statistical analysis was carried out with descriptive statistics of mean, SD and percentage values. Unpaired two-tailed ‘t’ test was used to compare the two groups. 2x2 ANOVA and Duncan’s post hoc test were applied to compare the groups in terms of their developmental progression of cognitive, scholastic and socio-emotional functions. For an in depth study, the performance of all the children with learning difficulties at both the grades were subjected to a qualitative profile analysis.

The summary of the findings is as follows -

- The children with Learning difficulties differed significantly in the cognitive functions of Perception, visual memory and auditory memory, with the children with LD performing poorer than the NLD at both the grade levels, with the exception of time taken on attention.

- The differences between 4th grade children with LD and the children with NLD were not statistically significant on Simple addition, Simple subtraction, and graded addition. There were significant differences on simple multiplication, graded multiplication, graded division and all the fraction areas tested between the 7th grade LD and NLD groups.
• The mean differences between LD and NLD groups were highly significant at both the grade levels (p = 0.00) for all the tests of Language i.e., oral reading, single word reading, writing and spelling.

• With the exception of home, all areas of adjustment tested (school, peers, teachers, and general) were significantly different for the LD and NLD groups at both the grade levels. There were significant differences in all sub-scales of self-esteem (general, social, academic, parental and total), except for social area in the 7th grade level. The LD children view their difficulty in learning as delimiting and stigmatizing in comparison to the NLD children at both the grade levels. There were significant differences on both state and trait anxiety scales between the children with LD and NLD at 7th grade level but only on state anxiety, significant differences were found in the 4th grade level.

• Higher cognitive functions like spatial perception, visual memory, and auditory memory persist from lower grade level to higher grade level. But there is significant improvement in the attention process from the 4th grade children with LD to the 7th grade children with LD.

• There were marked improvements in mathematical ability by the 7th grade children with LD in comparison to the 4th grade children with LD.

• Statistically significant differences in all measures of the language tests, including spelling at .000 level was present for both the LD children between lower and higher grade levels. There was very little improvement on the number of errors made in the writing (copying) from the 4th grade to the 7th grade LD children.
• There were significant differences among the LD children between 4th and 7th grade levels on the both state and trait anxiety measures, i.e., the 7th grade children with LD had higher mean levels of state and trait anxiety than the 4th grade LD children.

Conclusions

The hypothesis I that the children with learning difficulties are poorer in cognitive functions than the children with no learning difficulties was true with the exception of attention.

In view of the results obtained, hypothesis II can be accepted as there were significant differences in most of the socio-emotional functions tested, except for home adjustment at both grade levels and social self esteem at 7th grade level.

As there was significant scholastic skill improvement in spite of the persistent cognitive function difficulties, hypothesis III can be retained.