

Personality differentials among children with learning disabilities and normal learning abilities

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ABSTRACT

The present investigation entitled was undertaken to compare the personality traits of children experiencing learning difficulties, with those who were not experiencing any learning problem. The study was conducted on 120 primary school children (6 to 8 years). The sample was equally divided into learning problem (N=60) and learning non-problem (N=60) children. Early school personality questionnaire (Coan and Cattell, 1966) was administered individually to assess the personality traits of two groups of children in the school premises only. The results revealed that children experiencing learning difficulties were more reserved, emotionally less stable, phlegmatic, obedient, sober, expedient, shy, tough-minded and placid as compared to children not having learning problems who were excitable, happy-go-lucky, socially bold, tender-minded and shrewd.

Key Words : Disabilities, School children, School premises, Happy-go-lucky

INTRODUCTION

Learning disabilities can be life long condition, that, in some cases, affect many parts of a person's life, school or work, daily routines, family life and sometimes even friendship and play. In some people, many overlapping learning disabilities may be apparent. Other people may have a single, isolated learning problem that has little impact on other areas of their lives.

Not all problems are necessarily learning disabilities. Many children are simply slower in developing certain skills. Because children show natural differences in their rate of development, sometimes what seems to be a learning disability may simply be a delay in maturation (www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/learningdis.htm).

Normal children, from infancy or early childhood, display personality traits which give insight into and in some cases quite govern their performance. These personality traits e.g, tension and anxiety are strongly associated with academic achievement in children. The low

and high anxiety leads to poor performance and an optimal level of anxiety leads to better performance (George and Lakshminarayanan, 1988).

Learning disabled children experience a wide variety of socio-emotional and behavioural problems in addition to their learning difficulties (McConaughy and Ritter, 1986). Different sources of information such as learning-disabled children's self-reports, peer evaluations and teacher ratings provide consistent information in comparison to non-disabled children's, comparatively lower popularity and greater rejection by peers as well as their higher dependence on other children during social interactions (Margalit, 1989).

The learning disabled children have also been reported to have higher levels of depression and anxiety. They are most often socially isolated, that is, neither accepted nor rejected but simply ignored by the majority of their peers (Goldstein and Dundon, 1987). However, Torgerson (1982) found that the learning disabled are more dependent on intellectual activities, less hardworking, more impulsive and less capable of understanding directions. Learning disabled students typically attribute success to luck or to an easy task and failure to the teachers' personality and not their own aptitude for the subject (Pearl and Donahue, 1980). Psychologists (Pintrich *et al.*, 1994) have reported differences in affective and motivational variables between two types of students. Students with learning disabilities mostly attribute success to external causes, whereas students without learning disabilities more often attribute success to internal causes.

Tarver and Hallahan (1976) have described ten primary characteristics of learning disabled children. They are : hyperactivity, perceptual motor impairments, emotional state (up and downs, moodiness, anxiety etc.), general coordination deficits, disorders of attention (distractibility, perseveration), impulsivity, disorder of memory and thinking, specific academic problems in reading, writing, spelling and numbers, disorders of speech and learning and neurological signs. Even with normal acceptable level of tension and anxiety, the children's personality traits might be responsible for a great many of the symptoms of speech, language and other learning disabilities.

The present study was therefore planned to examine the personality traits of the learning disabled and non-disabled children. This work can be helpful for the educationists, psychologists and social workers in designing remedial programmes for disabled children and their families.

METHODOLOGY

Locale of the study :

The study was conducted in randomly selected Government Primary Schools of Ludhiana city.

Sample :

The sample for the present study comprised of 120 children between the age of 6 to 8 years studying in 1st and IInd grade. It consists of equal number of learning abled (n=60) and learning disabled (n=60) children. Learning disabilities were operationalised as the manifested difficulties in reading-writing-skills like vocabulary, visual perception, auditory discrimination and copying abilities. The learning disabled child was the one who had performed average and above in intelligence but poor on reading-writing-skills was considered as learning disabled

child.

Selection procedure :

Class teachers of the Ist and IInd grades in these schools were approached to get the list of low and high achievers falling in the age range of 6 to 8 years. All enlisted low achievers from the Ist grade were examined for their intellectual abilities and reading writing skills *i.e.* vocabulary, visual perception, auditory discrimination and copying. The children who performed below average in any four of the reading writing skills but average and above on intellectual tasks were designated as learning disabled group. Then equal number of top high achievers from the same grade were purposively drawn and tested on the same tasks to find their learning skills and intellectual abilities. Children performing at average and above range on all types of learning skills as well as intelligence test constituted the group of learning abled children. Therefore, children performing at average and above average level of intelligence but free from any visible handicap were included in the group others were excluded from the sample. Similar procedure was followed on IInd graders. The number of learning abled children was equal to the number of learning disabled children from a particular grade in a particular school and the total sample comprised of 120 children.

Instruments for data collection:

The following tests were used for various assessments and observation on the sample children and their parents.

Scale of reading-writing skills (R-W-S test) :

The scale has been designed by Singh (1993) to identify learning disabilities among children from 5 years of age. It measures the learning difficulties in children through their performance in reading writing skills.

1. *Vocabulary*: The ability of the child to identify objects with in the range of his/her experience at the entry level of grade one.
2. *Visual perception*: The ability of the child to identify similarities between geometrical figures, letters and numbers.
3. *Auditory discrimination*: The ability of the child to discriminate the similar and dissimilar beginning sound of various letters and words.
4. *Copying* : This part of the test measures a combination of visual perception and motor control which are required in learning to write.

The raw scores were converted in to stanine norms which were further converted into percentiles, which show the level of reading-writing abilities of an individual. The children scoring average and above in reading writing skills are termed as learning non-disabled, whereas those scoring below average were learning disabled.

Coloured progressive matrices :

The coloured progressive matrices developed by Raven (1962) was used to assess the intellectual abilities of children. Each child was graded according to his intellectual level on the basis of percentile rank achieved by him. As already mentioned a child who had performed

average and above in intelligence but poor on reading-writing-skills was considered as learning disabled child. Only those children who attained the intellectual abilities at average or above grades were included in the sample.

Early school personality questionnaire (ESPQ) :

This scale was developed by Coan and Cattell (1966). It is a questionnaire designed for convenient group administration to children in the six-to-eight years of age range, or, in academic terms, children in grades 1, 2, and 3. This test helps to measure child’s personality and possible personality problems at the very outset of primary school life. The ESPQ yields scores on thirteen dimensions of personality with a minimum of testing time.

Each personality trait is bi-polar. The children scoring low on a particular personality trait were placed on the lower pole or dimension while the children scoring high on that trait were assessed to be on the other pole or dimension. On the basis of sten scores, personality traits of each child were classified into any one of the three categories *i.e.* low, moderate and high.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Personality traits of learning abled and learning disabled children :

The difference between learning abled and learning disabled children’s personality traits is explained by analysing the mean personality scores of learning abled and learning disabled children in Table 1. Data revealed that learning disabled children were having lower mean scores in personality traits such as reserved vs outgoing behaviour, emotional stability, excitability, assertiveness, happy-go-lucky, conscientiousness, ventureous, tender-mindedness,

Table 1 : Personality traits (mean scores ±SD) of learning-abled and learning disabled children				
Factors	Traits	Personality scores		t-value
		Learning abled MS±SD	Learning disabled MS±SD	
A	Reserved/outgoing	6.87±1.93	6.75±2.00	0.33
B	Less intelligent/more intelligent	5.55±1.71	6.18±2.08	1.81*
C	Affected by feelings/ emotionally stable	7.58±1.77	7.13±1.55	1.48
D	Phlegmatic/excitable	4.08±1.76	3.32±1.88	2.29**
E	Obedient/Assertive	3.58±2.30	3.43±2.20	0.37
F	Sober/Happy-go-lucky	7.65±1.36	6.55±1.35	4.45***
G	Expedient/conscientious	6.12±1.35	5.80±1.36	1.29
H	Shy/Venturesome	7.12±1.91	6.07±2.77	2.42**
I	Tough minded/ Tender-minded	7.80±1.71	7.13±1.81	2.08**
J	Vigorous/Doubting	5.80±1.55	6.27±1.58	1.64
N	Forthright/Shrewd	5.22±1.60	4.43±1.28	2.99**
O	Placid/Apprehensive	6.17±1.88	6.48±1.21	1.07
Q ₄	Relaxed/Tense	5.63±1.53	6.30±1.27	2.61***

* Significant at 10% level

** Significant at 5% level

*** Significant at 1% level

doubting and shrewdness but scored higher in intelligence apprehension and tension as compared to learning abled children. But significant differences were found in intelligence ($P < 0.1$), excitability ($P < 0.01$), happy-go-lucky behavior ($P < 0.05$) social boldness ($P < 0.01$), tender mindedness ($P < 0.01$) and shrewdness ($P < 0.05$) and emotional tension ($P < 0.05$) only.

It can thus be concluded that learning disabled children were more reserved, intelligent, emotionally less stable, phlegmatic, obedient, sober, expedient, shy, tough-minded, placid, apprehensive and emotionally tense as compared to learning abled children. Students with learning disabilities often demonstrated more problems in social competence than do their peers without disabilities. Findings of the study are consistent with the earlier studies conducted by Andrew (2003) which concluded that there is a significantly higher level of emotional problems and disturbance in children with learning disabilities.

Correlation between personality traits and learning abilities :

Table 2 shows the correlation between different personality traits and different learning abilities. Vocabulary of the 1st and 2nd grade children was significantly inversely correlated with intelligence : factor B ($P < 0.01$) and emotional stability : factor C ($P < 0.05$), whereas it was directly significantly correlated with phlegmatic temperament vs excitability : factor D ($P < 0.05$). It shows that as the intelligence level and emotional stability among children increased their vocabulary decreased. On the other hand, with increase in activity level and excitability among children they possessed better vocabulary. Though, the correlation

Table 2 : Correlation between personality traits and learning abilities						
Personality Factors	Traits	Learning-abilities				
		Vocabulary	Visual perception	Auditory-discrimination	Copying	Total abilities
A	Reserved/outgoing	0.037	-0.144	-0.144	0.110	-0.039
B	Less intelligent /more intelligent	-0.376***	-0.144	-0.260***	-0.183*	-
C	Affected by feelings/ emotionally stable	-0.213**	-0.011	-0.169*	-0.043	0.288**
D	Phlegmatic/excitable	0.199**	0.102	0.111	0.186*	0.190*
E	Obedient/Assertive	-0.063	0.086	0.063	-0.095	-0.005
F	Sober/Happy-go-lucky	0.011	0.131	0.080	0.026	0.083
G	Expedient/ conscientious	-0.109	-0.016	-0.090	-0.026	-0.068
H	Shy/Venturesome	-0.100	-0.050	-0.054	0.022	-0.046
I	Tough minded/ Tender-minded	0.067	-0.034	-0.078	0.157	0.045
J	Vigorous/Doubting	0.022	-0.025	-0.019	-0.007	-0.012
N	Forthright/Shrewd	0.109	0.132	0.203**	0.194	0.213**
O	Placid/Apprehensive	0.119	-0.049	0.046	0.078	0.056
Q ₄	Relaxed/Tense	-0.005	-0.019	0.069	0.072	0.044

* Significant at 10% level, ** Significant at 5% level, *** Significant at 1% level

coefficient values were non-significant, yet the personality traits like out going, happy-go-lucky, sensitivity, doubting, shrewdness and apprehensive/depressive behaviour of the children was directly correlated with vocabulary of the children. Simultaneously the assertiveness, venture and tension was negatively correlated with the vocabulary of the primary school children.

Table points out that, though the association between visual perception and all the thirteen personality traits was non-significant, yet visual perception among children was negatively correlated with outgoing behaviour, intelligence and emotional stability. It shows that as the intelligence and outgoing behaviour among children increased their visual perception decreased. But visual perception was positively correlated with excitability, happy-go-lucky, attitude and shrewdness. Visual perception of the primary school children was negligibly positively associated with assertiveness, while negatively with emotional stability, super-ego strength, venturesome behaviour, tender-mindedness, doubting, apprehension and emotional tension.

Table also revealed that auditory discrimination ability of the primary-school children was inversely significantly correlated with their intelligence and abstract thinking ($P < 0.01$) and with excitability ($P < 0.1$) among children. On the other hand shrewdness was positively significantly correlated with this ability ($P < 0.05$). It means that shrewd, calculating, worldly wise and penetrating children had better auditory discrimination abilities. It may be due to the fact that children who have higher abstract thinking tend to be more imaginative and day dreamers thus leading to their poor attention towards what is being instructed.

Table further displays that, copying abilities of the 1st and 2nd grade children had significant negative correlation with intelligence, ($P < 0.1$) but non-significant negative relationship with emotional stability, assertiveness, conscientiousness and doubting temperaments of the children, whereas it had positive but significant correlation with excitability but positive non-significant correlation with outgoing attitude, happy-go-lucky venturesome, tender-mindedness, shrewdness, apprehension and tension personality traits of the children.

The correlation coefficients of total abilities revealed negative significant correlation with intelligence and abstract thinking of the children, whereas total abilities were positively correlated with, excitability ($P < 0.1$) and shrewdness ($P < 0.05$) among primary school children. It shows that the children with learning disabilities were more intelligent, active, excitable, forthright, natural and artless whereas learning abled children had more concrete thinking and shrewdness. The other personality attributes like outgoing behaviour, emotional stability, venture, assertiveness, conscientiousness and doubting personality traits of the primary school children were negatively but non-significantly correlated with total learning abilities. Data also revealed that, happy-go-lucky attitude, tender mindedness, apprehension and tension had non-significant but positive correlation with total learning abilities.

Pandey (2001) in their study revealed that though certain personality traits were similar in both learning abled and learning disabled and both learning disabled and learning abled children were homogeneous with respect to their initial strength of super-ego. Yet, learning disabled students reflected more critical and fault finding tendency than learning abled children. Both the groups were similar in socialization process and social adjustments as they had the tendency of excusing themselves and others of blame.

McNulty (2003) studied adults diagnosed with learning disabilities and found that self

esteem problems may emerge by early childhood as individuals contend with aspects of their learning disabilities that interfere with typical personality development. By school age, all participants noted self-esteem problems when they experienced struggles or failures in schools, which could feel traumatic.

Conclusion :

The results revealed that children experiencing learning difficulties were more reserved, emotionally less stable, phlegmatic, obedient, sober, expedient, shy, tough-minded and placid as compared to children not having learning problems who were excitable, happy-go-lucky, socially bold, tender-minded and shrewd.

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