

Early Identification and Intervention: Amplifying the Voice of Slow Learners

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the importance of assisting students who may learn at a slower pace than their peers in school through lens of available research literature. These students have just as much potential as others but might need extra time and support to understand their school lessons. The study emphasizes how crucial it is to find and help these students early in their education. It's like offering them a helping hand precisely when they need it the most and also discusses what makes these students unique and how teachers, parents, and others can collaborate to provide the support they need. Discovering and assisting these students early can greatly improve their school performance and boost their self-confidence. It's like creating a personalized plan that suits each student's learning style, helping them excel in school and feel proud of their achievements. Furthermore, this study suggests that future research could develop deeper into the most effective strategies for identifying and helping slow learners. It also encourages exploring innovative ways to create inclusive and supportive educational environments that cater to the individual strengths and needs of these students. In essence, this research advocates for ensuring that every student, regardless of their learning pace, receives the necessary support for a promising future in school and beyond. It highlights the importance of early identification and intervention, and it paves the way for potential future research to continue improving educational practices for slow learners.

Key Words: *Slow Learner, Identification, Intervention,*

INTRODUCTION

Education, often described as the great equalizer, holds within its folds a diverse tapestry of learners, each embarking on a distinctive journey shaped by their unique abilities, strengths, and challenges. Among the multitude of students navigating the complex landscape of learning are those known as slow learners (Ahmad, Thomas & Hamid, 2020; Ahmad, Bibi & Imran, 2023; Ali, Ahmad, Rehman, Ullah & Zahra, 2023). These individuals, while possessing the same intrinsic potential as their peers, often require an additional dose of time and attention to fully comprehend and master the concepts and skills presented to them (Anggraeni, 2022; Raza & Ahmed, 2017; Jabeen, Ali, & Ahmad, 2023; Ali, et al., 2023).

Slow learners, as a segment of our student population, embody the remarkable diversity that education accommodates. Their learning paths, while sometimes winding and unconventional, are characterized by a rich tapestry of experiences, challenges, and victories. At its core, the term "slow learner" does not denote a scarcity of potential but rather signifies a distinctive approach to acquiring knowledge. These students, like any other, harbor untapped capabilities and aspirations, yearning for something foundational to their educational journey: understanding and support (Afzal, Khan, and Ali, 2021; Naeem, Ali, & Ahmed, 2022).

In this study, we embark on an exploration of the pivotal concept of early identification and intervention for slow learners. Our aim is to illuminate the profound and transformative impact that this approach can have on their educational trajectory. By delving into the intricate layers of slow learning, we seek not only to raise awareness but also to champion the cause of inclusive education, where every learner, regardless of their pace, is empowered to reach their fullest potential (Chauhan, 2011). As Daniel. Willingham (2011) aptly points out, slow learners are not dumb;

they possess the same potential as their peers. However, they differ in various aspects such as their knowledge base, implication in daily life, motivation, resilience in the face of academic setbacks, and self-respect as students in the classroom, both in front of their teachers and classmates. Burt (1937) further classifies slow learners as students who are unable to cope with the work normally expected of their age group. Carroll (2004) extends this definition by explaining that slow learners are students with below-average cognitive abilities who struggle to meet the traditional academic demands of the regular classroom. In essence, these students often find themselves in the lowest rung of the academic ladder, facing challenges in almost all subjects and frequently scoring less than 25 percent in tests. According to Anggraeni (2022), "Slow learner is a condition where students have intellectual potential slightly below the average.", "Due to abilities below the average of children at their age, slow learner student's ability in learning is slower than children at their age." Understanding slow learners, therefore, requires a holistic perspective that encompasses their unique learning needs, cognitive profiles, and the challenges they face in their educational journey. Through this understanding, we can pave the way for early identification and effective intervention, ensuring that slow learners are not left behind but are given the tools and support to thrive academically and personally (Younis, Naeem, & Ali, 2023; Ahmad, Rashid, & Ali, 2023).

Objective of the Study:

To explore the significance of early identification and intervention in the educational journey of slow learners and understand how it shapes their academic progress and personal development.

Research Question:

How does early identification and intervention impact the academic performance, self-esteem, and overall development of slow learners in primary and secondary education, and what are the key factors that contribute to its effectiveness?

Who is Slow Learners?

In the realm of education, there exists a diverse spectrum of learners, each with their own unique characteristics and learning styles. It's crucial to distinguish between two distinct categories within this spectrum: slow learners and children with specific learning disabilities. Each of these categories presents its own set of challenges and opportunities, highlighting the need for a nuanced understanding of their needs (Dibia, and Ajoku, 2018). A slow learner is typically characterized as a child with below-average intelligence, whose cognitive abilities and thinking skills fall below the norm for their age group. However, it's essential to emphasize that being a slow learner does not equate to a lack of potential. Rather, it signifies that these learners may progress at a slower pace compared to their chronological peers. With dedicated support and tailored interventions, slow learners can indeed make progress, albeit at a more gradual rate (Wiley, 2011).

On the other hand, children with specific learning disabilities are often of average or even above-average intelligence. However, they face specific difficulties that can significantly impede their learning process. These challenges can manifest in various aspects of learning, such as reading, writing, or mathematics, making these tasks particularly arduous. What sets this group apart is that, with the appropriate interventions and support, children with specific learning disabilities can work toward achieving age-appropriate academic levels over time (Eyo, & Nkanga, 2020). Our emphasis in this discussion lies primarily on slow learners, those individuals whose thinking skills may lag behind the expected norm for their age. While their progress may be slower, it's essential to recognize that they bring unique perspectives and strengths to the learning experience. Their hallmark is not a diminished capacity but rather a distinctive learning pace that unfolds at its own rhythm (Hartini, Widyaningtyas, & Mashlulah, 2017).

The challenges faced by slow learners often stem from a complex interplay of factors, including cognitive distinctions. These distinctions manifest as varying cognitive styles and preferences, shaping how slow learners engage with information and construct knowledge. This diversity in cognitive approaches enriches the educational landscape by offering alternative perspectives and innovative solutions (Ruhela, 2014). Environmental circumstances also play a pivotal role in shaping the experiences of slow learners. Factors such as the quality of early education, access to resources, and the level of familial support can either facilitate or impede their learning journey. Understanding these external dynamics is essential to providing tailored support that addresses the unique needs of slow learners (Kumar, Shambhu, & Aggarwal, 2016).

Furthermore, it's important to acknowledge that some slow learners may also contend with learning disabilities, adding yet another layer to the intricate tapestry of individual differences. These disabilities, while presenting challenges, are by no means insurmountable barriers to success. Instead, they underscore the importance of creating a responsive and inclusive educational environment that accommodates diverse learning needs (Vasudevan, 2017). In essence, being a slow learner does not signify a lesser path of learning; it signifies a different one. It is a journey marked by its own unique milestones, shaped by distinct cognitive nuances, environmental influences, and, at times, the presence of learning disabilities. Understanding this diversity in learning is fundamental to the creation of an inclusive education

system that not only recognizes but celebrates the immense potential within every student, regardless of their pace (Malik, Rehman, and Hanif, 2012).

Characteristics of Slow-Learner:

Slow learners are a diverse group of students who, despite their outward appearance, exhibit distinct characteristics that set them apart within the realm of education. According to Ruhela (2014), these traits are crucial for educators, parents, and caregivers to comprehend as they provide the foundation for appropriate support and interventions. Drawing from a variety of sources, including Brennan (1974), Haigh (1977), and Griffin (1978), we can identify the following key characteristics of slow learners:

Below-Average Academic Progress: Slow learners tend to progress at a slower pace academically compared to their peers of the same age. They often require more time and effort to grasp and master concepts and skills across various subjects.

Struggles with Complex Concepts: The world of abstract and complex concepts can be challenging for slow learners. They may find it difficult to connect ideas and often benefit from concrete examples and detailed explanations.

Reading and Writing Challenges: Slow learners frequently encounter difficulties in reading comprehension and writing. Decoding words, understanding context, and expressing themselves in written form can be particularly taxing.

Retention Hurdles: Retaining information poses a significant challenge for slow learners. They often rely on repeated review and reinforcement to remember and effectively apply what they have learned.

Shortened Attention Span: Compared to their peers, slow learners typically have a shorter attention span. Maintaining focus on tasks and sustaining concentration can be an ongoing struggle (Mohammad & Mahmoud, 2014).

Organizational Difficulties: Organizing their tasks and managing time can prove to be problematic for slow learners. Keeping track of assignments, materials, and deadlines often requires extra effort.

Low Self-Esteem: Many slow learners grapple with low self-esteem due to their academic challenges. Doubts about their abilities and a sense of discouragement in the classroom are not uncommon (Mushtaq, Khan, Roohi, & Ghori, 2022).

Need for Repetition: Slow learners often benefit from repetitive instruction and consistent reinforcement of concepts. Additional practice and support are frequently necessary to solidify their understanding.

Varied Cognitive Profiles: It's important to recognize that each slow learner possesses a unique cognitive profile. Strengths and weaknesses can vary, with some excelling in specific areas while facing difficulties in others.

Social and Emotional Impact: Academic struggles can take a toll on the social and emotional well-being of slow learners. They may experience feelings of isolation, anxiety, or frustration within the learning environment.

Individualized Approach: Slow learners often thrive when they receive personalized attention and interventions tailored to their specific needs. Developing personalized learning plans can be instrumental in addressing their challenges effectively.

Belief in Progress: Crucially, it's essential to acknowledge that slow learners are capable of making progress and achieving their academic goals. With the right support, patience, and encouragement, they can navigate their educational journey successfully.

FACTORS AFFECTING SLOW LEARNERS

According to Korikana (2020) slow learners, like all students, are influenced by a variety of factors that can impact the learning experiences and academic progress. These factors are important to consider when providing support and interventions for slow learners. Here are some key factors that can affect slow learners:



1. Factors Affecting Slow Learners

Cognitive Differences: Slow learners may have varying cognitive profiles, including differences in processing speed, working memory, and cognitive flexibility. These differences can influence how they learn and retain information.

Learning Disabilities: Some slow learners may have specific learning disabilities, such as dyslexia or dyscalculia, which can significantly impede their ability to acquire certain academic skills.

Environmental Factors: The quality of a student's learning environment, including access to educational resources, teacher-student ratios, and the level of familial support, can greatly impact their learning outcomes.

Teaching Methods: The teaching methods and instructional approaches used in the classroom can either facilitate or hinder the progress of slow learners. Individualized and differentiated instruction is often beneficial for this group (Muppudathi, 2014).

Emotional and Psychological Factors: Slow learners may experience emotions like frustration, anxiety, and low self-esteem due to their academic challenges. These emotional factors can affect their motivation and engagement in learning.

Parental Involvement: The level of parental involvement and support at home can play a significant role in a slow learner's academic journey. Supportive parents who work collaboratively with educators can make a positive impact.

Peer Relationships: The social dynamics within the classroom and peer interactions can affect a slow learner's self-esteem and sense of belonging in the academic environment.

Early Intervention: The timeliness of identifying a student as a slow learner and providing early intervention and support can influence their long-term academic success (Manichander, 2018).

Access to Special Education Services: Slow learners may benefit from special education services and accommodations. The availability and adequacy of these services can vary by school and region.

Motivation and Self-Regulation: Slow learners may require additional support in developing effective study habits, time management skills, and self-regulation strategies to enhance their learning.

Curriculum Adaptation: The extent to which the curriculum is adapted to meet the individual needs of slow learners can impact their ability to access and understand the content.

Attitudes and Beliefs: The attitudes and beliefs of both educators and students towards slow learners can influence their inclusion and overall learning experience.

Nurturing Potential through Timely Insight: Central to our exploration of empowering slow learners is the pivotal role played by early identification. This cornerstone element acts as a guiding beacon, illuminating the path towards not only academic success but also the holistic development of these exceptional individuals.

Early identification represents a profound commitment to understanding and catering to the diverse learning needs of our students. It is a process that transcends mere assessment; it is the art of perceiving the unique nuances in a slow learners journey as they embark on their educational odyssey (Trisnani, 2022). The benefits of early identification are manifold, weaving a safety net beneath the educational aspirations of slow learners. Firstly, it serves as a preventative measure, staunchly guarding against the emergence of daunting learning gaps that could potentially impede a student's progress. By identifying areas where additional support is needed, educators can bridge these gaps with targeted interventions, ensuring that no student is left behind (Vasudevan, 2017). Moreover, early identification holds the power to vanquish the shadow of inadequacy that sometimes plagues slow learners. When a student is aware of their learning pace and understands that it is valued and accommodated, the shackles of self-doubt begin to loosen. Confidence takes root, and the student's belief in their own potential is rekindled. Through early identification, the narrative shifts from one of deficiency to one of unique strengths and opportunities (Manichander, 2018).

According to Younis, Naeem, and Ali (2023) crucially, early identification is the gateway to tailored interventions. It unlocks the ability to craft personalized approaches to education, recognizing that each slow learner is a unique individual with distinct learning needs. These interventions range from adapted teaching methods to individualized education plans (IEPs) that map out a student's educational journey with precision. Beyond academics, early identification contributes significantly to the nurturing of self-esteem and overall well-being among slow learners. The knowledge that their learning style is acknowledged and supported fosters a sense of belonging and inclusion. Slow learners no longer feel like outliers but integral members of the educational community, valued for their contributions and unique perspectives (Zhou & Saeheaw, 2020). In essence, early identification is not a mere process; it is a profound commitment to the welfare and development of our students. It is the compass that guides us toward a future where every student, regardless of their pace, can flourish academically, emotionally, and socially. It is a testament to the potential that lies within every learner, awaiting the nurturing hand of understanding and support.

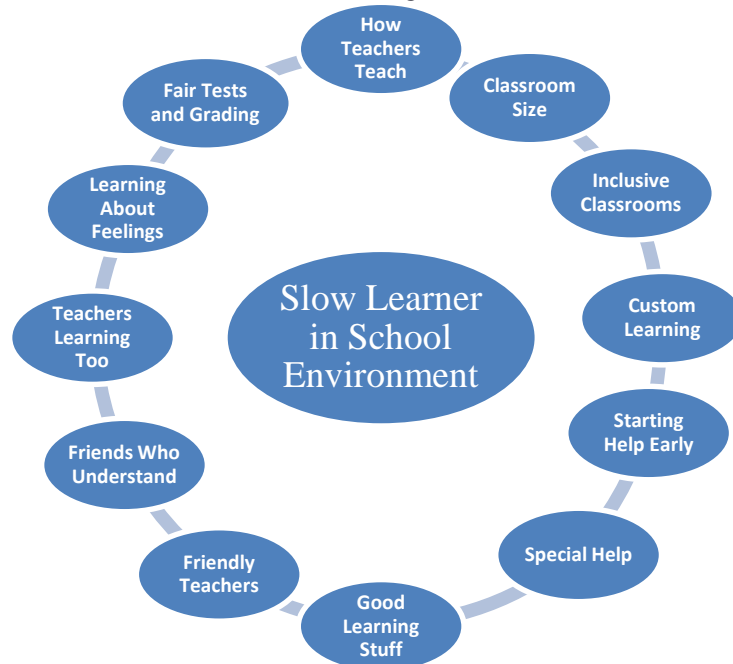
A Collaborative Approach to Nurturing Potential: According to Trisnani (2022) endeavor to foster an inclusive educational environment, the task of identifying slow learners necessitates a harmonious symphony of efforts from educators, parents, and caregivers. This collaborative approach seeks to uncover the distinctive learning needs of each student, ensuring that no potential remains concealed in the shadows of misunderstanding. The process of identifying slow learners is an intricate dance, and each partner in this collaboration plays a vital role. The methodologies employed are not just tools; they are instruments of enlightenment, revealing the unique pathways of learning that slow learners tread (Trisnani, 2022).

One of the primary instruments in this symphony of identification is the use of standardized assessments (Muppudathi, 2014). These assessments offer a structured and impartial lens through which educators can gauge a student's performance relative to established benchmarks. The data gleaned from these assessments can serve as a compass, guiding educators toward students who may require additional support. However, standardized assessments are but one note in this harmonious arrangement. The keen observations of educators, finely attuned to the nuances of their students' learning journeys, form another crucial element. Teachers, as the frontline custodians of education, are uniquely positioned to detect the subtleties that may elude quantitative assessments. The ability to recognize when a student is grappling with a concept or skill and to discern the signs of slower learning is a hallmark of a caring and attentive educator.

Additionally, the journey of slow learner identification is guided by the developmental milestones that students achieve. These milestones serve as guiding stars, illuminating the expected trajectory of learning. Deviations from these milestones can be indicative of a student's unique learning pace and their specific needs (Younis, Naeem, & Ali 2023). Yet, at the heart of this collaborative process is communication clear, open, and respectful communication. The exchange of insights and observations between educators and parents is an instrumental component of timely recognition. Parents, as the first educators in a child's life, possess invaluable insights into their child's development. When these insights are shared with educators, a more comprehensive understanding of the student's needs emerges. In essence, the methodologies of identification are not isolated actions but interconnected steps in a holistic process. They are the threads that weave together the diverse perspectives and expertise of educators, parents, and caregivers into a comprehensive portrait of each student. Together, they form a powerful chorus that resonates with understanding and support, ultimately nurturing the potential that resides within every slow learner (Mohammad, & Mahmoud, 2014).

FACTORS IN THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT AFFECTING SLOW LEARNERS

According to the Younis, Naeem, and Ali (2023) the school where students go to learn can really help or sometimes make it hard for slow learners. There are a bunch of things at school that can make a big difference:



How Teachers Teach: The way teachers teach is super important. Slow learners do better when teachers use different ways to teach and go at a pace that's good for them.

Classroom Size and How Many Students There Are: Smaller classes and not too many students in one class can be better for slow learners. This way, teachers can give more attention to each student and understand what they need.

Inclusive Classrooms: Classrooms that welcome all kinds of students, no matter how they learn, are great for slow learners. Teachers from special education and regular classes working together can really help.

Custom Learning: If the things students learn can be changed to fit what slow learners need, it's awesome. This means making adjustments so they can understand and do well.

Starting Help Early: Getting help for slow learners right from the start of school can make a big difference. It's often better to fix problems early.

Special Help When Needed: Sometimes, slow learners need special help like individual plans or different ways of doing things. Schools should be ready to give this help.

Good Learning Stuff: Having things like computers, extra teachers for reading or speech, and other helpful tools can really help slow learners.

Friendly Teachers: Teachers who are nice and make students feel good about themselves can help slow learners be more interested in learning.

Friends Who Understand: Having friends who are kind and accept everyone can make school more enjoyable for slow learners.

Teachers Learning Too: Teachers should keep learning about how to help slow learners. This way, they can use better ways to teach and understand what students need.

Learning about Feelings: Learning how to deal with feelings and get along with others is important. Schools that teach this stuff can help slow learners feel better and do well.

Parents and School Working Together: When parents and schools work together, it's great for slow learners. Parents can learn how to help their kids at home, and schools can give parents advice and tools.

Fair Tests and Grading: Tests and grading should be fair for everyone, including slow learners. Teachers should think about different ways of testing to make sure it's fair.

These things can make a big difference for slow learners and help them do well in school.

Crafting a Path to Empowerment: Within the tapestry of education, the intervention paradigm stands as a cornerstone in the quest to empower slow learners. It signifies a profound commitment to understanding the unique needs of these learners and illuminating the path toward their academic and personal success. This paradigm does not merely seek to bridge learning gaps but strives to build bridges that connect these learners to a future brimming with

possibilities (Anggraeni, 2022). At its essence, the intervention paradigm embodies the very spirit of inclusivity and personalized learning. It transcends one-size-fits-all approaches and delves into the realm of tailored, student-centric education. It is a testament to the belief that every learner, regardless of their pace, is deserving of an education that aligns with their individual capabilities and aspirations (Wiley, 2011).

The heart of this paradigm lies in the creation and implementation of Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). These plans are not mere documents; they are roadmaps that chart a student's educational journey with precision and care. IEPs are crafted through collaborative efforts, with educators, parents, and specialists working in unison to outline specific goals, accommodations, and support mechanisms (Mitchell, Morton, & Hornby, 2010). According to Korikana (2020) one of the key elements of this paradigm is differentiated instruction within mainstream classrooms. Differentiation is the art of adapting teaching methods, content, and assessments to cater to the diverse learning needs of students. For slow learners, it means a more accessible and accommodating learning experience that allows them to thrive alongside their peers. Specialized programs and resources also form a crucial part of the intervention paradigm. These programs are designed to provide targeted support, whether it's through one-on-one tutoring, speech therapy, or the utilization of assistive technologies. They serve as a safety net, ensuring that slow learners receive the precise support they require to reach their full potential. However, the intervention paradigm extends beyond academics. It recognizes that the educational journey encompasses not only the acquisition of knowledge but also the development of self-esteem, self-confidence, and overall well-being. It places a strong emphasis on creating an inclusive and supportive environment where slow learners feel valued, respected, and empowered. In essence, the intervention paradigm is a beacon of hope, guiding slow learners towards the realization of their potential (Hartini, Widyaningtyas, & Mashlulah, 2017). It is a declaration that learning is not a race but a journey, where every student deserves the opportunity to flourish. It is a promise that, within the embrace of understanding and support, the unique strengths and capabilities of slow learners can be cultivated, ultimately leading them to success in both their academic pursuits and personal growth (Vasudevan, 2017).

SOCIAL IMPLICATION OF THE STUDY

The study about helping students who learn a bit slower in school has some important effects on how our society works. Firstly, it talks about making sure every student gets the same chances to learn, no matter how fast or slow they learn. This can help our society become fairer and open to all kinds of people.

Secondly, it mentions that by helping slower learners early on, we can make sure that everyone has a good chance to do well in school. This means that our society can become more equal, where everyone has a fair shot at reaching their goals (Ruhela, 2014). Another thing the study talks about is how parents can be more involved in their child's learning. When parents and families are more involved, it can make our communities stronger and more supportive (Eyo, and Nkanga, 2020). Lastly, the study says that teachers should learn more to help all kinds of students. This can make our schools better, and everyone can learn more. In the end, this study can help make our society more fair, equal, and caring. It gives power to kids, families, teachers, and leaders to work together so that every student, even if they learn a bit slower, can do well and be happy (Carroll, 2004).

FUTURE RESEARCH FOR THE STUDY OF "SLOW LEARNER"

In the future, more research can explore different important things to help slow learners in school:

Better Ways to Help: Find new and better ways to help slow learners. This could mean making special plans for each student or using technology to help them learn.

How It helps in the Long Run: Study how early help affects slow learners when they grow up. Look at their jobs, how well they do in life, and how they feel about themselves.

Schools that Include Everyone: Figure out how to make schools that welcome all students, no matter how they learn. This could involve changing what students learn or helping them get along better.

Teaching the Teachers: Research how training for teachers can make them better at helping slow learners. See if teachers who learn more about this can help students do better in school.

Parents and School Working Together: Learn about how parents and schools can work together to help slow learners. Find out what parents can do at home to help their kids, and how schools can help parents.

Feelings and Making Friends: Study how slow learners feel and how they get along with others. Look at programs that teach students about their feelings and how to be friends.

Why Some Are Found Late: Find out why some slow learners aren't found and helped early. Look at how tests, teacher observations, and what parents say can help find them sooner.

Learning in Different Places: Explore how slow learning is understood and helped in different countries and cultures. See if there are different ways to find slow learners and help them.

Using New Technology: Check how new technology, like computers and special learning programs, can help slow learners. See if these things work well for them.

CHANGING THE RULES: Look at the rules and policies about special education and inclusive schools. See if these rules can be improved to help slow learners more. Find out how these rules affect students in school.

By doing this research, we can learn more about slow learners and how to make school better for them. We can use this knowledge to help them succeed in school and in life.

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