Teaching Approaches for Children with Dyslexia

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Abstract

Dyslexia is a problem facing many students in today's educational system. Unfortunately, it appears that there are no known medical alternatives to alleviating the cognitive processing challenges presented with dyslexia. Therefore, educators are required to make instructional adjustments if dyslexic students are to be successful in an academic environment. One of the primary adjustments that must be made is in the way dyslexic students are taught to read and write. A variety of successful solutions have been developed to address this dilemma. This paper provides an overview of the problems faced by dyslexic students and how teachers can modify their instructions to accommodate these difficulties.

Key words

Dyslexia, Approaches, Accommodate, Instruction, Educator.

Introduction

Trying to meet the individual needs of all students is a difficult task, as any educator today knows. That task is made even more difficult when the student has a diagnosed learning difficulty such as dyslexia. Dyslexia is a language-based learning disability. Dyslexia refers to a cluster of symptoms, which result in people having difficulties with specific language skills, particularly reading. Students with dyslexia may experience difficulties in other language skills such as spelling, writing, and speaking. Teaching students with dyslexia across settings is challenging. Both general education and special education teachers seek accommodations that foster the learning and management of a class of heterogeneous learners.

1. What is Dyslexia?

Dyslexia is categorized as a learning disability wherein school children do not achieve adequate reading skills. It has a worldwide incidence of 5-20%. The incidence of dyslexia in India is believed to be 15%. According to the Times of India, Jan 22, 2013, there are 228,994,454 students enrolled in recognized schools, which brings our count of dyslexic Indian children to nearly 35 million.

In the absence of appropriate standardized screening and assessment tools in Indian languages, it has been extremely challenging to screen and diagnose Dyslexia in India.

The exact causes of dyslexia are still not completely clear, but anatomical and brain imagery studies show differences in the way the brain of a dyslexic person develops and functions. Dyslexia is not due to either lack of intelligence or a desire to learn; with appropriate teaching methods dyslexics can learn successfully.

2. What are the effects of dyslexia?

The impact that dyslexia has is different for each person and depends on the severity of the condition and the approaches of the remediation. The most common effects are problems with reading, spelling, and writing. Some dyslexics do not have much difficulty with early reading and spelling tasks but do experience great problems when more complex language skills are required, such as grammar, understanding textbook material, and writing essays.

3. What are the signs of dyslexia?

Problems experienced by dyslexics include:
• Learning to speak
• Organizing written and spoken language
• Learning letters and their sounds
• Memorizing number facts
• Spelling and Reading
• Learning a foreign language
• Correctly doing math operations

It doesn't mean that all students having difficulties with the above skills are not dyslexic, formal testing is the only way to confirm a diagnosis of suspected dyslexia.

4. How the problems of dyslexia are treated?

It is a life-long condition, with proper guidance children can learn to read and write well.
• Early identification and treatment is the key to helping dyslexics to achieve in life.
• Most people with dyslexia need help from teacher, tutor, or therapist specially trained in using a multisensory structured language approach.
• Schools can implement academic modifications to help dyslexic students succeed.
• Mental health specialists can help students cope with their struggles.

5. Teaching Approaches for Children with Dyslexia.

The dyslexic student must be shown
• The big picture and then how the details fit into it.
• From parts to whole
• From the easy to the more difficult
• From simple to complex
• From the concrete to the abstract
• From the visual to the auditory
• Always showing him how new information fits in with what he has learned
• With much review and practice at every step of the way

The dyslexic student needs …

• A quiet, calm, structured, orderly, consistent and fair environment
• One or two verbal instruction at a time
• Short, simple instructions with few words.
• A simultaneous multi-sensory structured approach to his language learning that uses all three pathways of learning: Visual, Auditory and Kinesthetic-Tactile
• To be given every opportunity to use his creativity in his

learning.
- Time to process what he has heard
- Time to respond
- Time to complete assignment

6. Teaching Approaches in all Classroom Settings

The following measures appear reasonable and provide a framework for helping students with learning problems achieve in special education classrooms. They are organized according to materials, interactive instruction, and student performance.

A. Approaches Involving Materials

Students spend a large portion of the school day interacting with materials. Most instructional materials give teachers few activities or directions for teaching a large class of students who learn at different rates and in various ways.
- Clarify or simplify written directions.
- Use a tape recorder.
- Present a small amount of work.
- Block out extraneous stimuli.
- Highlight essential information.
- Locate place in consumable material.
- Provide additional practice activities.
- Provide a glossary in content areas.
- Develop reading guides.

B. Approaches involving interactive instruction

The task of gaining students' attention and engaging them for a period of time requires many teaching and managing skills. Teaching and interactions should provide successful learning experiences for such students. Some approaches to enhance successful interactive instructional activities are:
- Use explicit teaching procedures.
- Repeat directions.
- Maintain daily routines.
- Provide a copy of lecture notes.
- Provide students with a graphic organizer.
- Use step-by-step instruction.
- Simultaneously combine verbal and visual information.
- Write key points or words on the chalkboard.
- Use balanced presentations and activities.
- Emphasize daily Review.

C. Approaches Involving Student Performance

Students vary significantly in their ability to respond in different modes. The following approaches involving mode of reception and expression can be used to enhance students' performance:
- Encourage use of graphic organizers.
- Encourage use of assignment books or calendars.
- Reduce copying by including information or activities on handouts or worksheets.
- Have students turn lined paper vertically for math.
- Use cues to denote important items.
- Design hierarchical worksheets.
- Allow use of instructional aids.
- Display work samples.
- Encourage note sharing.
- Use flexible work times.
- Provide additional practice.

7. Types of Test Item Formats
- Make directions simple and include examples.
- Type or print directions. Never use cursive.
- Directions should be at the start of each test section.
- Be clear about students understanding all directions.

Essay Tests
- Give students a choice, more than one essay question per test.
- Ask or give explicit directions, questions, etc.
- Question and answer should be on the same page.
- Provide lined paper for answers.
- Provide a word bank.

Multiple Choice Tests
- Ask questions in complete sentences.
- Align questions and options vertically.
- Limit the number of options to not more than three.
- Circle the correct answer rather than filling in the blank.

Fill-In-The Blank Tests
- Don't count off for spelling. Allow students to underline the word/s that they suspect are incorrect, or provide a word bank.
- The length of the line should mirror the length of the answer.
  - There are _____ days in a year.
  - The first president of the India was
- The blank should be near the end of the question.
- (Students need a "trigger" word to get them started)

Matching Tests
- Avoid having students draw lines to connect the matches.
- Place the longer part of the match on the left, the short answers on the right.
- Do not list more than one match for each question.
- Keep all matches on the same page.
- Match by categories. Provide a line or spacing to divide the categories.

8. Conclusion

Dyslexia will affect a person's self-image. Students with dyslexia often end up feeling "dumb" and less capable than they actually are. After experiencing a great deal of stress due to academic problems, a student may become discouraged about continuing in school. Many capable children at all grade levels experience frustration and failure in school, not because they lack ability, but because they do not have adequate study skills. Good study habits are important for success in school, to foster feelings of competence, to develop positive attitudes, and to help children realize they can control how well they do in school and in life.

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