

# STUDY SKILLS OF LEARNERS WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTY

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**Abstract:** The present study was aimed to investigate how and what type of study skills are being used by learners who have learning issues. 20 middle school learners participated in the study. Data was collected through questionnaire and interview. An observation schedule was developed to observe the teachers and students in the class. The findings of the study indicated that, children use a variety of study skills, however the study skill of pictorial and diagrammatic representations work best with the learners. Also learners who underlined key words were able to yield better academic results. Learners with good hold and knowledge of study skills were better academic achievers as compared to the ones who didn't apply or use study skills. Though it was not a part of the study, it was revealed that teachers were aware of very few study skills which could be applied and they use them without matching the child's way of learning to his study skills. Teachers may need to receive more formalized study skills training in order to provide study skills instruction in their classrooms and help boost student learning and academic achievement in the core content areas. The study also pointed to the fact that organizational skills played a major role in determining the type and combination of study skills the learners apply.

**Keywords:** Skills of Learners, academic achievement.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The primary task in the class room is learning. Learning is a step by step, complex, interwoven and multilevel process. It comprises of the complex sequential process of input, processing and output. Each of these have several essential components, with the dys- functioning in any one of these causes problems in learning. These problems have come to be referred as learning difficulties. Children with learning difficulties face a lot of pressure on them to perform. The ways by which they can match their expected performance and actual performance is by the application of study skills. Study skills can be defined as learned abilities essential to acquiring knowledge and competence. Study skills emphasize the process of learning (Marshak, 1979; Marshak & Burkle, 1981). A general study skills program including curriculum-specific study strategies has value to students in each and every class. Study-skill competencies should constitute a significant part of educational objectives so as to prepare students for subsequent school work in elementary, middle school, and high school. Different aspects of study skills are needed at specific grade levels (Petercsak, 1986; Smith, 1959; Walker & Antaya-Moore, 2001).

The learning process is developmental and involves acquiring, growing, changing and improving students' knowledge. The ability to study efficiently and effectively is, in fact, a distinctive characteristic of most high-achieving students. The converse is also true; that is, many poor students are unproductive because they lack good study skills. Thus, the teaching of study skills increases students' learning capacities and assists them in adapting to various teaching methods and instructional approaches (Estes & Vaughn, 1985). Some strategies are more effective than others for each individual. Students must get to know their own study-skills strengths and weaknesses. Thus the term "study skills" will be defined as "competence in acquiring, recording, organizing, synthesizing, remembering, and using information and ideas" (Proctor, Prevatt, Adams, Hurst & Petscher, 2006, p. 37).

A lot of research evidence shows that there is a direct co relation between the application and usage of study skills and academic performance of students with learning issues in class. A study was conducted by Meneghetti et al (2207) with a

group of 354 students between the age of 12 and 15, found that high achieving students are able to recognize the use of good strategies and typically use good study skills over less effective study skills (p630.)

There are various studies which point to the fact that -if good study skills are taught and practiced by the students who have learning issues, they are able to cope up better with the study demands or academic pressure. In a study conducted by Dolin Anny (2010), it was found that note taking while reading is the most effective study practise. It heightens the student's attention and encourages the students to put the material in their own words, which becomes easy for them to remember. However, in another study, conducted it was found that-teachers are not well aware of the effective study skills, which could be used for children with learning issues.

A study was conducted by Dunlosky .J, (2010) he researched 10 study skills. It revealed the following study skills to be more effective:-

- **Elaborative interrogation:** Answering why a fact is true
- **Self-explanation:** Explaining what a section of text or an example problem means to you
- **Practice testing:** Testing yourself on the material you are trying to learn
- **Distributed practice:** Spreading your studying out over several sessions
- **Interleaved practice:** Mixing different kinds of problems together when studying

Keeping all these pointers in mind, the present study was aimed to look into various study skills which children with learning issues apply and use.

**HYPOTHESIS:** Children with learning difficulties, when apply effective study skills are able to perform better at academics, as compared with the ones who do not.

**Operational Definition of study skills:** Different methods or ways used by the children to cope up with the class and give deliver desired academic results.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

The present study was undertaken to ascertain the study skills used by children with learning issues in the school.

Sample- the sample consisted of 20 students in Gujarat. All the participants of the study were interviewed, to find different methods of study skills they are aware of. Also various class room observations were also done to see the application of different study skills by them in the class.

Participants who agreed to be interviews were given a consent form prior to the interview and were assured that there responses would remain confidential and they can withdraw from the study, whenever they want. The study consisted of a sample of convenience and therefore, gernalizability cannot be assumed.

Table 1 shows the distribution of learners who participated in the study:-

**Table 1**

Class	Boys	Girls
5	6	4
6	4	6
Total	10	10

The school was selected through purposive sampling.

## 3. METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION

Data from the children were collected using the following techniques:

- Interview
- Observations
- Questioner

The interview method was used, as it allows the investigator to seek detailed information from the subjects. There are several advantages of this technique, and it was easy to assure that whether the respondent understood the question or not (Gulati, chopra, & Wadhwa, 1994).

Participants attitude about the importance of particular study skills and study skills instructions was measured using a 15 point devised questionnaire. The questions revolved around the relationship of study skills and academic achievement. It also focused on student's knowledge and the effectiveness of the study skills. It also aimed at knowing the specific study skills applied by the learners and the frequency or ease with which they apply it. Several of the study skills showed by the learners with learning difficulties were similar to the study performed by Meneghetti et al, (2007).

The interview addressed some similar questions as these presented on the questionnaire. It also asked the participants which study strategy or skill they found least effective and how they inculcate different study skill strategy in class.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the tools used in the study a pilot study was done on 2 learners with learning issues. By analyzing the result, few changes were made in the questionnaire and interview schedule.

#### ***Class observations:-***

The learners were observed in the class on the following pointers:-

- Study skill used
- Persistent use of the skill
- Academic result
- Confidence of the learner
- Influence of the peer

*Questionnaire*-The average response to the questions in the 15 point questionnaire were calculated to determine which study skill was the most popular among the learners with learning issues. The responses of the learners are shown in table 2. The various study skills which were revealed during the study are:-

- ✓ Note taking.
- ✓ Key words underlying.
- ✓ Use of highlighters.
- ✓ Over-viewing
- ✓ Mind mapping.
- ✓ Use of diagrams/graphs
- ✓ Repetitions.

**Table 2**

S.NO	STUDY SKILL	RATING OF THE STUDY SKILL FROM 1-5 ( Mean representation)
1.	Note taking	3
2.	Key words underlying	4
4.	Use of highlighters	4
5.	Over viewing	2.5
6.	Mind Mapping	3
7.	Use of diagrams/graphs	5
8.	Repetitions	4

***Interviews***- The qualitative response to the interview questions concerning which study skills the learners were applying and which one they found least effective were recorded. The responses were then categorized in 3 groups- Most effective study skill, least effective study skill and the strategies used to apply in class. It was found that though repetitions was used widely by students as a learning skill, however it gave less effective results in comparison with study skills of over viewing.

Mind mapping which gave more effective results in form of academic achievement. Use of diagrams/graphs was found to be the most effective and interesting study skill used by students. It also gave better understanding and productivity to the students. Beside this various other study skills were also revealed by students, like- motivation. What study skills their friends are using they apply to themselves. Graphics or making small pointers on the side of the sheets or reading materials were used as a way by which students integrated study skills in the class.

One of the students response” *I don't like studying big-big passages. I am not able to understand its meaning. I have to read it many times. But when I convert the entire paragraph in the form of diagrams or pictures I am able to retain it for longer time*’. This response to the interview showed the effectiveness of visual learning for children with learning difficulties.

#### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The present study revealed that Students with learning issues use a variety of study skills to help them cope up with the academic demands. The following table shows the different type of study skills used by them.

**Table 3**

Study Skill	No. Of students who use the skill
Note taking	11
Highlighters	10
Key words underlining	7
Mind Mapping	4
Diagrams/graphs	13
Repetitions	15

Learners were demonstrating these study skills.

**Note Taking**-It is the practice of writing down the information in a systematic format. By taking notes the writer records the essence of the information. It may also include putting things into your own words. They work best when they are numbered or bullet-ed.

**Highlighters**- A highlighter is a type of writing device used to draw attention to sections of text by marking them with a vivid, translucent colour. They are used by the students to bring keywords into focus. This is one of the most popular study skills which the students use, as it gives best results with minimum efforts.

**KeyWords Underlining**-It is the process of underlying- strategically, selectively and purposefully. With selective underlining and highlighting, the idea is to underline only the key words, phrases, vocabulary, and ideas that are central to understanding the piece. Students should be taught this strategy explicitly, given time and means to practice, and reinforced for successful performance. In selective underlining/ highlighting, students capture: • main ideas • key concepts • details of a reading • target, reduce and distill the needed information from a text • strengthen reading comprehension. Simmons, M. (2006).

**Repetition**: - This was a strategy which was used by most of the students. However, it was found that this was not the most result oriented. As most of the participants shared, that sometimes even after constant repetition, they were not able to understand the content. They apply this strategy to mug -up the content. This strategy was not understanding oriented but marks oriented.

**Review**- This is the most useful study skill. It helps the students/learner-correct their mistakes and add on to their marks. However, as shared by most of the learners, since they were not able to compete their on time, they rarely applied this skills. But when they did, they were able to see a change in their result.

During the study, it was found that the application of study skills doesn't exist in isolation. A wide range of factors affect them. Some of these factors are:-

1. **Interest in Subject**- The study revealed that students applied different study skills with keen interest in areas of their interest. A subject like History, civics which the students didn't prefer to study were the ones were only one type of study skill was applied.

2. **Social Network**- It was also found that learners study skills or habits were influenced by their peer group. They usually prefer to study in the same way as their friends are, without thinking whether it suits their learning pattern or not.

3. **Conventional Study Methods**- The study showed that students were applying the same or common study skills, which are being used from a very long time without any innovation. They were also not aware of various apps which are available in different gadgets which could help them to grasp better and perform better.

4. **Motivation**: - This is an important determinant factor. If the student or learner has an internal motivation to improve himself/herself, they apply or use a variety of study skills.

Beside this, the study also revealed that students with learning difficulties often struggle in organizational skills. However, while applying study skills it was found that students who had good organizational skills were able to show effective time management and thus, were able to juggle between different study habits as compared to the ones with not effective organizational skills.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Academic achievement form a very important part of our society. Learners are viewed according to the marks or grades they obtain. This is one of the key factors which determine the liking or disliking of the child towards academics. This puts a lot of pressure on the learner. This pressure is even greater for the learners with learning difficulty. To deal with this pressure one applies study skills. They are either applied in isolation or in combination.

The study revealed that students used a wide variety of study skills. Though repeating or repetition was used as a common way of studying, it was not able to deliver the desired results. On the other hand study skill of mind mapping and diagrams or graphs which were not used by more students yielded better results and understanding of concepts. It also showed that, the study habits which students inculcate depends upon the common ways or means which their friends or peers are using. Constant motivation was also found as a key factor which encouraged the learners to use different means to apply and achieve their desired academic results.

It was also revealed that teachers are not aware of the different means/skills which they can teach the students so as they can upgrade their academics.

Thus, we need more studies where the teachers are made aware of the different learning/study skills. They should also be made aware of different learning styles which the learners possess and how to match it with their correct study habits. This will help the learners to enjoy the academics and give the desired result with the correct efforts.

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