



Breaking Barriers: An Experimental Study on Individualized Strategies for Struggling Learners

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Abstract: *Intensive, individualized teaching practices are structured, specific, and designed for use with a child who needs extra help to learn a particular skill or concept. This level of support can be used if a child has a unique goal or is making very slow progress after less intensive strategies, such as curriculum modifications and embedded teaching practices, have been tried. Kids who struggle with learning difficulties, such as slow learners, typically have lower academic performance compared to their peers. Nowadays, these children are not only found in special Education programs but also in mainstream schools. Educators lacking sufficient experience may face challenges in supporting them effectively in the classroom. Therefore, the objective of this study is to identify suitable learning approaches for slow learners in primary Education. Individualized learning is where students set their own learning goals to work on. Students are given the autonomy to guide their personal learning journey and educational experiences. Learners progress through the curriculum at their own pace using resources and methods to suit their learning needs.*

Keywords: *Individualized Teaching Practices, Curriculum Modifications, Learning Approaches.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

Slow learners are children who struggle to achieve academic skills and are often overlooked as being dull, lazy, or inept in the school environment. These students fall behind their peers not only academically but also socially, emotionally, and psychologically. Studies suggest that 5 to 15 percent of school-aged children experience academic challenges. Identifying at-risk students early on is crucial and requires further attention and research. Despite not having intellectual disabilities, neurological impairments, or learning disorders, slow learners underperform in school. There is a discrepancy between their expected academic achievement based on their intellectual abilities and their actual performance. As student's progress through school, the complexity of subjects and assignments increases, placing a greater emphasis on their motivation to engage in self-regulated learning.

These issues tend to impact slow learners more frequently than children identified as mentally retarded. When a general education teacher chooses not to offer additional assistance to a slow learner, it can lead to lasting repercussions. Slow learners make up around 14.1 percent of the population according to estimates derived from a normal distribution. This highlights the need for intervention training to support slow learners in achieving as close to normal development as achievable. Considering these factors, an experimental study based on Integrated Intervention was suggested to explore methods for achieving a notable improvement in the academic performance of slow learners.

The study used a Pretest Posttest Randomized Controlled Trial design to evaluate the impact of Integrated Instruction on the academic performance and psychological well-being of slow learners. The Experimental Group consisted of 60 9th-grade slow learners from a Government High School who received a specially designed integrated intervention program over six weeks. The Control Group included another 60 slow learners from the same school who did not receive any intervention during the study period.

To ensure homogeneity in the sample size, participants were matched based on age, gender, IQ, mother tongue, and socio-economic status. Slow learners were identified through three screening methods: academic performance (students scoring below 50% consistently in monthly and quarterly exams), teachers' assessment (identifying those rated as dull



or below average), and intelligence tests (using the Standard Progressive Matrices to categorize students below the 25th percentile as slow learners).

2. Nature of Integrated Intervention

A Three Tier Individualized Integrated Intervention Programmed

A three-tier mutually supportive Integrated Intervention programmed was administered to the slow learners.

1. Individual Skill Development programmed included three activities:

Graphic organizer, mindfulness meditation, and mnemonics, tailored to improve memory, goal setting, and overall study skills for slow learners. These activities were conducted from 3:30 to 5:00 pm over a 12-week period.

(a) Graphic Organizer Method involved creating organizers using 'X Mind' and 'Microsoft Smart Art' for Biology and History lessons. Only slow learners in the experimental group received these organizers as additional academic support for 40 minutes daily over 12 weeks.

(b) Mindfulness Meditation program consisted of 20-minute daily sessions for 12 weeks. Participants learned mindfulness techniques and practiced them daily, including holidays, to enhance emotional control and adjustment.

(c) Mnemonic Strategies introduced slow learners to mnemonic techniques like the method of loci, the letter method, and the keyword technique to enhance their memorization skills. These strategies were exclusively provided to the experimental group.

II. Teacher Mentorship Program (Promoting positive outlook for students with learning challenges)

The program focused on shifting teachers' perspectives towards students who face learning difficulties by emphasizing

(i) Acceptance and support for these students,

(ii) Recognition and praise for displaying positive behaviors, and

(iii) Fostering positive expectations for students regardless of past experiences. A three-day workshop was conducted to provide teachers with insights from behavioral science.

III. Concentration Enhancement through Relaxation Training

Jacobson's Progressive Muscle Relaxation therapy was used to enhance the focus of slow learners in their academic subjects. The intervention aimed to motivate both the slow learners and their mentors to invest more effort in acquiring the necessary knowledge and skills to excel in their subjects.

3. Data Collection Methods :

The study utilized the following tools to gather data: -

Ravens Standard Progressive Matrices (SPM) by Raven (2000 a) - Academic performance data from school records - Academic Self-Efficacy scale by Muris (2001) - Harter's Self-Perception Profile (Harter, 1985) for self-perception assessment - Child Behaviour Scale by Ladd and Profilet (1996) for socio-emotional adjustment evaluation - Malhotra's Temperament Schedule (MTS) by Savita Malhotra and Anil Malhotra (1988) - Intrinsic Motivation Inventory (IMI) by Ryan (1982)

Data Collection Methods Phase

I: Preliminary Data Collection: The initial data collection took place in August/September 2011.

Phase II: Implementation of a Comprehensive Intervention Program: An integrated intervention program with three tiers of support was administered to the Experimental Group of Slow Learners from October 2011 to January 2012, involving students, parents, and teachers.

Phase III: Follow-up Data Collection: Immediately after the completion of the integrated intervention program provided exclusively to the experimental group of slow learners over a 12-week period, the academic performance of both the



experimental and control groups in their annual exams was gathered, along with other psychological criteria. Once again, the relevant teachers, parents, and respondents were asked to provide data on parameters such as academic self-efficacy, self-perception, socio-emotional adjustment, temperament, intrinsic motivation, and academic performance levels using the same questionnaire as in phase I. The gained scores of the experimental and control groups of slow learners were compared using an independent sample t-test to confirm the significant effects of the integrated intervention on the experimental group

Additionally, effect sizes were calculated using Cohen's d to determine the relative impact of the experimental treatment. Based on the analysis, the following conclusions were drawn:

- (i) **Academic Performance:** The integrated intervention, along with traditional classroom teaching, demonstrated notable effectiveness in enhancing the academic performance of slow learners in Biology and History subjects in grade 9.
- (ii) **Self-Efficacy:** The experimental group showed a significant enhancement in Academic Self-efficacy, likely due to the impact of the integrated intervention. The use of graphic organizers and memory techniques appeared to be effective tools in helping slow learners summarize ideas and structure their writing, leading to improved information retrieval.
- (iii) **Self-Perception:** The self-perception of slow learners in the experimental group, particularly in Scholastic Competence and Global Self-worth, showed a considerable increase in the post-test.
- (iv) **Socio-emotional Adjustment:** The experimental group of slow learners exhibited a substantial decrease in Anxious Fearful Behavior and an increase in Pro-Social Behavior, which may enhance their cognitive abilities and reading skills, helping them overcome feelings of inadequacy in academic activities.
- (v) **Temperament:** The experimental group showed significantly higher gain scores in the dimensions of Sociability and Attentiveness compared to the control group, indicating increased attentiveness in classroom activities and interactions with teachers and peers. (vi) **Intrinsic Motivation:** The experimental group experienced a notable increase in Perceived Competence and Effort/Importance, along with a significant decrease in Pressure/Tension, suggesting enhanced motivation levels among slow learners.

Suggestions: Research has definitively shown that tailoring Integrated Interventions for slow learners can improve academic performance and psychological well-being. Key recommendations stemming from these crucial psychological factors are divided into short-term and long-term categories.

4. Short-term Strategies: -

- Introducing Mindfulness Meditation immediately to decrease academic and general anxiety and stress.
- Implementing an Integrated Intervention Programmed for slow learners at the initial stage, including graphic organizers, mindfulness meditation, mnemonics training, and relaxation techniques on a periodic basis.
- Enhancing the self-efficacy and self-perception of slow learners through consistent intervention.
- Leading studies to tackle the limitations and gaps in this research.
- Substituting unconditional promotions with thorough continuous assessments to track the advancement of slow learners.

5. Long-term Strategies:-

- Implementation of graphic organizers and mnemonics as learning strategies by including guidelines in the appendix of textbooks.
- Regularly conducting mentoring programs for teachers to improve their awareness, attitude, and competence.
- Increasing parental involvement through effective sensitization efforts.
- Improving the teacher-student ratio, particularly at the primary level, at a national level.
- Developing a national inclusive policy for slow learners and students with learning disabilities to ensure Education for All (EFA)

6. Conclusion: Based on the information provided, project-based learning models can be effectively utilized to cater to the needs of slow learners in a diverse elementary school setting. By selecting a flexible strategy plan that can be adjusted to the classroom environment, teachers can accommodate students with varying abilities. The implementation of project-based learning is anticipated to address the challenges faced by slow learners, such as low achievement,



memory retention issues, lack of attention, slower learning pace compared to peers, need for additional stimuli to complete tasks, and difficulties in social adaptation and relations within the classroom. To support these students, teachers may consider implementing team teaching with a partner to provide additional support. Additionally, utilizing a group system and creating a specialized assessment rubric for slow learners can ensure that academic progress is measured based on individual capabilities while still fostering collaborative learning experiences with peers.

- Additionally, through project-based learning, children can retain information for longer periods of time by applying knowledge gained through hands-on experiences.
- Moreover, this approach encourages collaboration among students to work on group projects, which helps address the issue of lack of attention among slow learners.
- Furthermore, slow learners benefit from discussions with peers and support from teachers, enabling them to gradually catch up with their peers.
- In addition, teachers provide concrete materials to stimulate learning and enhance understanding.
- Lastly, social interaction is promoted through active participation in learning activities, fostering good social skills among slow learners.
- In conclusion, project-based learning serves as an effective model that can be adapted to support slow learners in elementary school.

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