

## A STUDY ON STUDENTS WITH SOCIAL AND BEHAVIOURAL PROBLEMS AT MANTISSA COLLEGE MALAYSIA

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### ABSTRACT

*This research focuses on generating knowledge about the indifferent needs amongst students related to education and learner's development at Mantissa College. This research also emphasizes on the learning challenges faced by the students with social and behavioural issues and the strategies developed to overcome those challenges. There is a wide range of behavioural challenges that students struggle with due to the unknown disorders associated with emotions and social aspects. The research methodology undertaken is qualitative and realism in nature and data is collected from primary as well as secondary sources. The primary information is collected from two practitioners who teach and manage the classroom of students facing social and behavioural issues. The results indicated that learning challenges faced by the social and behavioural effected student including inability to pay attention, incapability to accept change rapidly, low motivational level, repetitive actions and issues to communicate with others easily. The strategies undertaken to deal with these issues include innovative way of teaching, friendly relationship, positive reinforcement and encouraging students.*

**Keywords:** *Learning challenges, social and behavioural issues, strategies to overcome learning challenges.*

### INTRODUCTION

This research is an individual based report which has focused on generating knowledge about the indifferent needs amongst students related to education and learner's development. This study covers different dimensions of learning individuals from where various educational needs are connected. Multiple theories on the subject of educational issues and other behavioural problems that students face while studying or learning have been taken into consideration while constructing this research. The role of instructors, practitioners, and facilitators has also been evaluated to understand the issues that learners face in order to obtain knowledge about something that is new to them.

## **Background of the Study**

According to Lackaye, Margalit, Ziv and Ziman (2006), human are subjective and no two human would behave in the similar manner to a given situation. It happens because there are specific gaps in the diverse range of capabilities that some individuals possess while others do not possess the same kind of physical skills, attributes or capabilities. Such gaps create differences amongst individuals which restrict them in acquiring new learning and developing their capabilities. The differences may occur amongst individuals in any given situation belonging to the group of students of different ages. Lack of intelligences, personality, ability to think wisely, strong cognitive capabilities and other social skills all are included in the category of social and behavioural issues that students may encounter while learning or studying. Intelligence is one of the abilities that enable an individual for application of prior acquired experience or knowledge on a dissimilar situation that comprises of a challenging task (Sutherland & Snyder, 2007). In view of Bartholomew, Deary and Lawn (2009) the concept of g-factor was introduced as the general intelligence that can easily influence one's capability towards learning of new concepts. There exists a heterogeneous cluster of students that belong to the wide range of students that possess learning disabilities and take time in grasping new ideologies. The type of the disability of each student is different and so is the degree of severity of the disability of the student. As the level of severity of the disability is different for every individual, the need of techniques for learning is different for every individual. Similarly, Gulchak (2008) included that the field that has special focus towards the individual and special education needs of students has evolved only recently and there is wide room for exploring different dimension for education o related needs of children along with the common problems that they come across in their routine lives. The student having different needs require more attention to cover the need gap as compared to the learners having no such problem in the process of grasping the idea that is taught to them. The modern educationists believe and make efforts towards developing curriculums that not only fulfil the needs of every learner but also caters to the different way of teaching which helps in the learning of students with special educational needs. There are today a number of various teaching approaches that have been developed by studying the differences amongst individuals and the approach that can best assist them in acquiring knowledge about the subject being taught (Villa, Thousand & Nevin, 2008).

## **Research Objectives**

The aims and objectives of this study involve the determination of different educational needs that are possessed by each individual and to create knowledge about the techniques that help in the acknowledgement of such needs. This study aims to highlight the number of theories and principles linked with educational psychology and its effective implementation by educational instructors and practitioners across the globe. This study also aims to shed light upon the subjects of low motivation and low self-esteem which influence the leaner ability and capabilities of students belonging to different age groups and demographic backgrounds.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The learning process for every individual is not same and therefore the requirements to grasp a new experience or event or skill or information are different for every learner to absorb the knowledge that is being transferred. There exists a wide range of behavioural challenges that students struggle with because of the unknown disorders associated with emotions and social aspects. Every human being is designed differently having a dissimilar set of abilities and disabilities that play a significant role in the learning process of an individual (Lopes, 2007). The students who have such disabilities while learning usually lack confidence because of which they cannot communicate about the difficulty they face while learning about new ideas and concepts. An individual's educational needs influence its ability to perform well at academic level because of which the field of educational psychology has evolved. The behaviour of a learner can easily reflect the social, behavioural, or emotional disorder that an individual is struggling with. Usually the behavioural disorder of a learner is connected to the cultural values and the age bracket in which an individual falls (Kos, Richdale & Hay 2006). The culture and age of a learner are the two basic dimensions which are further subdivided into internal and external heads. The academic performance of a learner is directly associated with the social abilities and skills of an individual. Individuals are created with needs to be heard and to be understood, when a person is deprived of such needs a gap develops between the person and the rest of the world which plays a vital role in causing stages of depression. The problems that restrict or limit the ability of learning of an individual may be related to antisocial behaviours, extreme aggressive behaviours, and disturbing attitude problems. When the society declines the acceptance of students having social and behavioural disorders or disabilities, it results in the withdrawal or isolation of the students who may become unresponsive because of being socially rejected (Getzel, 2008). The responses from different educational instructors and practitioners have revealed that the behaviours that expose any kind of learning disability in a student are related to externalization which is highlighted by hyperactive behaviours from the students like yelling, beating, neglecting the lecture and the teacher, standing unnecessarily out of their seats. Such behaviours specify them as students with different needs and are suffering from a psychological disorder that is separating them from other normal students. The behaviour of non-compliance is also an indicator of a learning disability in the individual that limits the scope of learning (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor & Schellinger, 2011). Behaviours like crying, arguing, and talking less are some of the actions that an individual would exhibit while passing through a disturbed period but repeating such behaviours frequently is a sign of behavioural or emotional disorder that a student might be suffering with. The students expressing antisocial behaviours are the ones that do not question or ask about the solution for problems that they might be facing in developing their learning capabilities. The students who portray antisocial behaviour also involve themselves in conflicting behaviours that isolate them from the other students in the same surrounding (Lopes, 2007).

As given by the Disability Rights UK (2010), according to the Act of Equality 2010 UK, educational institutions and practitioners are required to make specific adjustments in order to ensure that the disabled students are not left behind or are at a disadvantage when compared with non-disabled individuals. This Act further presents that disability is defined as a permanent mental or physical problem that causes delay or affects the normal chores of an individual over a longer period of time. Similarly, Maag (2006) is of the view that few of the major disabilities include Autism or Asperger syndrome, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), social and emotional disabilities, bi

polar disorder, learning difficulties, physical impairment, and speech, language and communication impairments. Autism is defined as a disorder in neurology which causes social, behavioural, and communicational issues. Bock (2007) presented that another disability and special condition is that of Asperger syndrome that creates issue in social interaction and learning abilities. Individuals with these two syndromes follow repetitive actions and behaviours and do not accept changes easily and readily. Due to dissimilar nature and personality of students with social and emotional disorders, they require different lifestyle, day to day schedule and different educational needs therefore it is important to fulfil their educational needs differently to make them a better person in their life (Montgomery, 2013).

As indicated by Swanson, Harris and Graham (2013) in their book that the way knowledge, skills, and abilities are acquired and developed in students facing social and emotional disorder are different from that of normal students. Special students lack behind in studies and acquiring knowledge when in the class of normal students as their speed and ability of understanding and grasping concepts is different due to their cognitive impairments. Similarly, Heiman and Berger (2008) presented in their research that the challenges that are being faced when teaching children with social and behavioural disorders include communication barriers, tantrums of these students, low willingness to change, extreme level of frustration and anxiety, high need for innovativeness and creativity along with difficulty in understanding rules and directions. In order to cope up with such challenges, the teachers and parents are required to work together to ensure a successful future for individuals with social and behavioural disorder. Lack of concentration, inability to identify the emotional aspects of others and unpredictability are also some other challenges faced by students having social and behavioural disabilities. On the other hand, Machalicek, O'Reilly, Beretvas, Sigafos and Lancioni (2007) mentioned that the teaching classroom is to be different for social and behavioural challenged students as compare to that of normal students. Teachers and practitioners of emotional and behavioural distributed students are to be well trained and are required to be good at patience and empathizing along with understanding the problems of their students. In class, variety of innovative and creative colourful charts and drawing can be used in order to help students in learning and retaining new things. The use of combination of visual effect and animations by using multimedia projector and high quality audio can facilitate in better learning for these students as creativity and innovativeness entices them more than anything else (Self, Scudder, Weheba & Crumrine, 2007). In addition, Rao, Beidel and Murray (2008) are of the view that the students with autism and Asperger syndrome follow a strict time plan and perform their activities on time; this serves as a helping aid for the teachers and practitioners as a proper time plan is developed and followed for timely activities and learning. Moreover, as students with social and behavioural disorders are unable to accept change and show intense resistance to it thus using a structured time table can help in further growth and improvement of these students. Inability to connect to others individuals and higher issues in social interaction, communication, and speech are also major challenges faced by the practitioners and educational providers for teaching children with social and behavioural disabilities. This challenge can be resolved by giving proper attention to each of the student, one to one interaction, developing pairs of students to help them in interacting and to overcome their social challenges (Cappadocia & Weiss, 2011).

## **METHODOLOGY**

In order to identify the challenges faced by the students and the practitioners in educating individuals facing social and behavioural issues, the research methodology of this study follows exploratory study as the challenges are to be explored along with the strategies undertaken to overcome those challenges faced. The research philosophy of realism is employed for this purpose as real issues and challenges along with the strategies to overcome them are to be investigated. Primary as well as secondary data are undertaken in order to explore and comprehend the research topic in depth for better understanding; secondary data is collected through various book, journal articles, and online sources whereas primary data is collected through interviews. The reason for using interviews as data collection technique is due to the fact that in depth information is required for better understanding of the topic.

The population for the current research is the group of practitioners that teaches social and behavioural challenged individuals in Mantissa Institute, Kuala Lumpur. However, as all of the individuals from the population cannot be interviewed therefore the sample size drawn is of 2 respondents where both of them are practitioners who teach and manages the students faced with social and behavioural issues in a classroom setting. This research is purely qualitative as challenges and strategies undertaken cannot be presented through quantitative representation. The sample is selected by using the convenience sampling technique because the teachers who are the sample are from the educational institute selected on the basis of convenience of the researcher. A consent letter was sent to the educational institute and a follow up was maintained with the teachers to allow the researcher in conducting the interview regarding the topic undertaken. The interview questionnaire developed emphasize on the challenges that the students with social and behavioural issues face and the strategies undertaken by the practitioner to overcome those challenges in an effective manner. Questions regarding the identification of the challenges, reluctance that those challenges create in learning for students are also investigated through the questionnaire. The success rate of those strategies developed and employed is also a question included in the interview questionnaire for the practitioner. The interview questionnaire developed for the current study is included in the appendices of this report.

The current study based on individual differences and special educational needs follows an inductive research approach as no hypothesis has been developed and the topic is just to be explored in depth to identify the challenges faced by practitioner due to the differences they possess. In addition, a cross sectional time horizon as the information for the research is collected for a particular time period and not for a longer and continuous period of time. The interview was conducted in the institute where the respondents belong to as they were not allowed to be interviewed outside the premises of the institute by the management. A written letter was given to the institute signed by the researcher stating that the information collected from the interview will be used for the research purpose merely and will not be shared with anyone. The personal information including name, address and contact number of the respondent was not taken as they feared that their personal information will be disclosed to others. While conducting the interview, one respondent and one interviewer and a person to record the responses were in the room assigned by the institute. No audio or video recording was taken as it was restricted by the institute; however, the answers by the respondents were recorded manually on paper scripts for conducting the analysis. The interview with each practitioner lasted for 25 to 30 minutes.

The information collected from the interviews conducted with the two respondents is analysed in the report through ethnographic content analysis.

## **FINDINGS**

### **Individual Differences Require Special Educational Needs**

Both of the respondents were inquired regarding their opinion on the fact that individual differences require special educational needs; in response to it, Respondent 1 said *“Each individual is different from the other in terms of abilities and skills but it is not necessary that they have special educational needs; however, in the case of individuals faced by Social or Behavioural problems have entirely different educational needs as they cannot compete well with the students that are not faced by any such issue therefore different educational classroom setting and educational curriculum is developed for these students.”*

Respondent 2 mentioned *“Students with mental disabilities are different from those students that are without disability therefore the interest, attention and ability to grasp knowledge is lower of these students and they cannot learn effectively in a crowded classroom; therefore due to the differences of students facing social and behavioural issues require different classroom setting with higher level of attention for better learning and to overcome their communication and social issues.”*

This primary data is well supported by the research findings of Oliver and Reschly (2010). Those are of the view that as the individuals with social and behavioural issue responds differently to different situations and are less attentive than normal students thus this leads to inability to match the academic growth rate of students facing no issue. This leads to lowered self-esteem and motivation of these individuals therefore a different institute and teachers are required for these kinds of students.

### **Major Learning Challenges Faced When Teaching Students Having Social or Behavioural Issues**

The respondents were inquired regarding the challenges that teachers and practitioners face when teaching students having social or emotional issues, in response to it, Respondent 1 said *“There are different challenges in teaching such students as there are variety of social and emotional issues where a student of ADHD is hyperactive and cannot be moderated by the teacher; a student with Autism Spectrum Disorders follows strict time schedule and does not maintains eye contact. However, similar issues include low self-esteem and motivation as they are not appreciated by anyone.”*

The other respondent responded by saying *“Such students usually possess delay in cognitive and social functioning, communication issues, inability to respond in time; these serve as the challenges that we face when teaching students having social and emotional issues. Less attention, resistance to change and higher absenteeism are also some other issues as parents cannot force these kids to go to school. These issues are to be dealt effectively by us and we are required to remain patient for handling these kids in order to increase their motivational and self-esteem level.”*

As stated by Kauffman, Mock and Simpson (2007), major learning challenges faced when teaching students having social or emotional issues include verbal and non-verbal communication issues, inability to pay attention to variety of such students, issues in maintaining discipline in the classroom along with the issue of gaining their attention and modifying their behaviour towards an optimistic side.

### **Identification of Major Learning Challenges Faced By Students with Social or Behavioural Problems**

The time and the extent to which these learning challenges faced by students with social and behavioural problems are identified was another question included in the questionnaire; in reply one of the respondents shares his view by saying *“Majority of the challenges are identified in the initial phase of teaching these Children as we are trained to identify these issues instantly by observing the student. The initial test is also conducted just to examine and observe the different characteristics that a Child possesses in order to develop his/her teaching curriculum differently.”*

In response to this question, the other respondent stated *“Parents of student with social and behavioural problems are usually involved in designing strategies for them in the initial phase in order to identify the learning challenges that their kid possess to handle them effectively and to help them in learning and developing.”*

Lewis, Jones, Horner and Sugai (2010) are of the view that it is important for a teacher to identify the major learning challenges faced by students with social and behavioural problems at an early stage only in order to deal with it effectively and to make sure that the strategies and activities do not hurt or are harmful for the learning of such student. Involving parents can also help in identification of the major challenges faces by the students as they know their habits and actions better than anyone else.

### **Strategies and Actions Employed to Address the Learning Challenges**

Once the answers to the learning challenges and identification of these learning challenges are received, the question regarding the strategies and actions employed to address the learning challenges is investigated. In response to this question, Respondent 1 said *“The rules and regulations are expressed to the students in easy words and are published on various notice boards as these students find it difficult to follow and remember rules and regulations. Colourful pictures and attention grabbing material for learning is used to attract these students. Teachers are not changed frequently as these students take time to be familiar and friendly to new comers. Sharing amongst students is encouraged to overcome their social resistance and instant reward and recognition is followed.”*

The other respondent presented *“Pictorial learning and social story telling are the main strategies undertaken for learning and development whereas playing activities are also used as a tool of learning. Students are made to learn from their own mistakes and less punishment is exercised. These students are given one to one training and speech therapy for better communication and understanding. One of my student used to pay less attention and was playing with his stationary and hands without paying any attention to my words in the class therefore a new strategy based on earning points was introduced; for every*

*positive behaviour students get points that can be exchanged for time they can use for playing their favourite video game.”*

Sutherland, Lewis-Palmer, Stichter and Morgan (2008) presented that strategies for addressing learning challenges of students includes developing friendly relationship, developing a proper schedule to be followed, teaching through interesting and innovative activities and appreciating their good actions for increasing their self-esteem and motivational level.

### **Challenges Faced While Implementing Strategies to Overcome Learning Challenges**

Respondents were further inquired regarding the challenges faced while implementing strategies and the means to overcome those challenges, in response to this question, Respondent 1 presented his view by saying *“Unacceptability of students to new classroom and new behaviours taught serves as challenge when implementing strategies to overcome the challenges faced by our students. In order to deal with it, a process is followed when teaching new behaviours to the students that include modelling, rehearsing the appropriate behaviour, role playing, continuous reinforcement, and prompting students.”*

Another respondent mentioned *“The resistance of students and their parents to adapt the new strategies developed by the teachers and practitioners serves as a major challenge when implementing strategies as a mean to overcome learning issues; to overcome this issue, the parents are informed about the need to implement such strategies is because of the betterment of their Children whereas the resistance of students is managed by incentivizing them by giving them stars and smiley faces and developing a friendly relationship with them.”*

According to Stoutjesdijk, Scholte and Swaab (2012), resistance of students can serve as higher challenge while implementing the strategies for students with behavioural and social issues as these students are not able to accept change instantly; however, the positive reinforcement can help in motivating these students to accept change.

### **The Level of Success Attained in Implementing the Strategies Developed**

Finally, the question regarding the extent to which they attain success in implementing the strategies that they develop was asked. In response to it, Respondent 1 mentioned *“In the initial phases, the success of implementing these strategies is uncertain but when the parents and the students accept and get familiar to these strategies, then the success rate seems to accelerate.”*

Another respondent stated *“In the long term, the level of success increases because success can only be determined by the implementation of the strategy developed and implementing on such students takes time due to their less adaptability to change.”*

As indicated by Ducharme and Shecter (2011), the strategies and interventions ultimately leads to success as these are developed in order to facilitate learning and development of such students only and are formulated after proper analyses of the behaviour of the students facing social and behavioural issues.



## **CONCLUSION**

According to the analysed data, it can be concluded that there are variety of learning challenges faced by the social and behavioural effected student including inability to pay attention, inability to understand rules and regulations, incapability to accept change rapidly and to communicate with others easily. These factors contribute to low motivation and less self-esteem for these students therefore a separate institute and different teaching curriculum is required to be set for such students. The strategies undertaken to deal with these issues include innovative way of teaching using pictures and graphics to develop attention of these students. Friendly relationship, positive reinforcement, one to one communication, and encouraging students are also some of the other strategies used to ensure the learning and development of students facing social and behavioural issues.

This research has practical implications for students, teachers, policy makers and institutions that interact with such students as these students need special care and attention in order to boost their motivational level and self-esteem for their better and bright future. Policy makers can develop policies to protect the rights and benefits of such students along with offering them a wide variety of subjects to undertake for improving their knowledge, skills, and abilities.

## **Recommendations**

In light of the above conducted analysis, few of the recommendations to practitioners to deal with students facing social or behavioural issue are given below:

- Teachers should consider understanding the behaviour and recognizing the problems of such students is essential before implementing any strategy;
- Parents should be involved in development of strategies as they can facilitate in better evaluation of the benefits for their children;
- Colourful books and animations should be used for teaching purpose in order to gain the interest and attention of the students towards learning;
- Low interest activities should be followed by high interest activities but in a playful manner to increase the excitement of students;
- Learning by doing and modelling should be used for making these students learn better along with facilitating them to retain it for a longer period of time.

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