

## **Factors Influencing Learning of Children with Specific Learning Disabilities: Exploring the Experience of Teachers**

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**Abstract:** *In 21<sup>st</sup> century India, classrooms stand as welcoming spaces that champion Equitable and Inclusive Education for all children. Legislation and policies have paved the way for learners from diverse backgrounds to join in learning together, creating an environment where children of all abilities, including those with disabilities, are embraced. However, existing literature reveals that despite this inclusive framework, there exist various factors that hinder the learning process for children with Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD). The central aim of this study is to identify the factors that impact the learning journey of children with SLD within the educational landscape of Odisha. Employing a descriptive survey approach and focusing on elementary school teachers as the study's population, insights were gathered through a custom-designed tool that captured the experiences of teachers working with these students. The findings underscore several crucial factors that influence the learning experience of children with specific learning disabilities. These include the lack of awareness surrounding SLD, the attitudes and perceptions of peers, parents, and educators, the educational background of both parents and teachers, the structure of the curriculum, the absence of suitable teaching and learning materials, the overall school environment, and community engagement. In light of these discoveries, this paper puts forward recommendations for teachers, parents, policymakers, organizations, and other stakeholders. By addressing these factors, the education system can create a more conducive and empowering learning environment for children with specific learning disabilities, fostering their growth and development in a truly inclusive setting.*

**Keywords:** *Specific Learning Disability, Inclusive Education, Teachers' Experience, Education for all.*

### **Introduction**

India is a country of immense diversity, and this diversity is reflected in its classrooms. Schools include children not only from various socio-economic and cultural backgrounds but also those with diverse abilities, including disabilities. The inclusion of children with disabilities aims to address the needs of

those enrolled in schools but excluded from meaningful learning—especially those who require flexibility and additional support (DFID, 2010).

Legislative and policy frameworks have enabled children with disabilities to participate in mainstream education. International declarations such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), the Salamanca Statement (1994), the Dakar Framework (2000), and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2007) emphasize the right to inclusive education. These international mandates have informed India's approach to inclusive education.

National initiatives like the Kothari Commission (1964), NEP–1968, and NPE–1986 advocated for the inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream education and the training of teachers in special education. The Integrated Education for Disabled Children (IEDC) program, supported by UNICEF and Govt. of India in 1987, was a foundational step.

Subsequent flagship schemes such as Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (2001–02), Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (2009), and Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (2018) introduced a wide array of interventions—including the Mid-Day Meal scheme, Operation Blackboard, and DPEP—to promote inclusive and quality education. Under Samagra Shiksha, specific provisions have been made for children with special needs (CWSN), such as aids and appliances, transport facilities, assistive technology, scholarships, and awareness camps.

The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2016) expanded the definition of disabilities, including Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD), and emphasized nondiscriminatory access to education, individualized support, appropriate pedagogy, and inclusive environments.

NEP 2020 further builds on these foundations by recommending the integration of children with SLD into regular schooling, providing assistive devices, trained special educators, flexible curricula, and inclusive assessments. Chapter 6 of the policy highlights the prevalence of SLD in classrooms and stresses the need for early support and teacher preparedness through inclusive teacher education programs.

Despite these extensive legal provisions, schemes, and interventions, various studies (Darow, 2009; Limaye, 2016; Pandey & Pandey, 2017; Sharma & Kohli, 2018) indicate persistent barriers in implementing inclusive education effectively. These include societal stigma, lack of information, organizational inefficiencies, infrastructural limitations, instructional gaps, policy challenges, and financial constraints.

While researchers have explored general factors affecting children with disabilities, limited attention has been paid specifically to the educational challenges faced by children with Specific Learning Disabilities. This study aims to fill that gap by identifying the key psychological, parental, institutional, and socio-economic factors impacting the learning journey of children with SLD in the context of Odisha. Based on teachers' experiences, the findings will help develop actionable recommendations for educators, parents, policymakers, and stakeholders to create a more supportive and inclusive educational environment for children with SLD.

**Objective**

The primary objective of this research is to identify the factors that affect the learning journey of the children with specific learning disabilities by exploring the experiences of teachers at elementary level.

**Methodology**

This research study employs a descriptive survey approach. Focusing on elementary school teachers as the study’s population, insights were gathered from teachers from three neighbouring districts of Western Odisha – Balangir, Bargarh and Sambalpur. Using a custom-designed tool researcher captured the experiences of teachers working with students with specific learning disabilities. Though data were collected from teachers (N=83) with and without experience with children with specific learning disabilities, the analysis was delimited to those teachers (N=66) who have encountered children with specific learning disabilities in their teaching career. Analysis was done with simple percentage calculation.

**Result and Discussion**

Teachers were asked to share their views on to what extent the various factors affect the learning of children with SLDs. These factors were categories under – demographic factors, psychological factors, socio-economic factors, parental factors and institutional factors.

**Table 1: Demographic Factors**

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Never</b>	<b>Rarely</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Often</b>	<b>Always</b>
<b>Age</b>	15.15	12.12	59.09	3.03	10.61
<b>Gender</b>	60.61	16.67	19.70	0.00	3.03
<b>Birth order</b>	33.33	18.18	33.33	3.03	12.12

Table 1 reveals how demographic variables influence the learning process of children with SLD. Age appears to be a sometimes-impactful factor (59.09%), suggesting varying developmental needs across age groups. Gender was mostly considered a non-influential factor (60.61% never), indicating minimal perceived gender-based learning differences. Birth order

showed a mixed perception, with responses equally distributed among never (33.33%) and sometimes (33.33%), suggesting it might play a moderate role.

**Table 2: Psychological Factors**

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Never</b>	<b>Rarely</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Often</b>	<b>Always</b>
<b>Intelligence</b>	10.61	13.64	28.79	16.67	30.30
<b>Mental Ability</b>	16.67	6.06	24.24	15.15	37.88
<b>Interest</b>	15.15	9.09	24.24	10.61	40.91
<b>Motivation</b>	13.64	4.55	27.27	12.12	42.42
<b>Aptitude</b>	18.18	9.09	24.24	13.64	34.85
<b>Attitude</b>	16.67	6.06	31.82	13.64	31.82
<b>Self-Efficacy</b>	13.64	6.06	36.36	18.18	25.76
<b>Emotional Maturity</b>	9.09	9.09	30.30	19.70	31.82
<b>Concentration</b>	10.61	10.61	19.70	13.64	45.45
<b>Thinking Ability</b>	12.12	10.61	18.18	10.61	48.48

As it can be seen from Table 2 that Child's psychological characteristics are also some of the factors affecting their learning. Thinking ability (48.48% always), concentration (45.45%), motivation (42.42%), and interest (40.91%) were consistently rated as critical influences on learning. Notably, emotional maturity (31.82%) and attitude (31.82%) were also rated high. These findings underscore the vital role of individual cognitive and emotional attributes in the learning process.

**Table 3: Socio-economic Factors**

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Never</b>	<b>Rarely</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Often</b>	<b>Always</b>
<b>Caste</b>	66.67	7.58	16.67	1.52	7.58
<b>Religion</b>	65.15	9.09	13.64	3.03	9.09
<b>Location</b>	40.91	12.12	28.79	4.55	13.64
<b>Family Income</b>	34.85	10.61	31.82	6.06	16.67

Table 3 shows that socio-economic factors, particularly caste (66.67%) and religion (65.15%), were largely rated as non-influential. However, family income (31.82% sometimes, 16.67% always) and location (13.64% always) received moderate attention, suggesting that while not primary, certain economic conditions still affect educational outcomes.

**Table 4: Parental Factors**

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Never</b>	<b>Rarely</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Often</b>	<b>Always</b>
<b>Qualification of Parents</b>	16.67	7.58	28.79	12.12	34.85
<b>Occupation</b>	27.27	12.12	30.30	7.58	22.73
<b>Income of parents</b>	28.79	10.61	36.36	7.58	16.67
<b>Awareness of SLD</b>	19.70	9.09	25.76	15.15	30.30
<b>Attitude towards SLD</b>	13.64	7.58	33.33	15.15	30.30

Table 4 indicates that in the parental factors, parental qualification (34.85% always), awareness of SLD (30.30%), and attitude towards SLD (30.30%) were recognized as influential. These responses highlight the importance of informed and supportive parental involvement in managing SLD

**Table 5: Institutional Factors**

Factors	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
School Environment	15.15	12.12	21.21	6.06	45.45
Structure of Curriculum	13.64	12.12	25.76	7.58	40.91
Awareness of teacher	10.61	12.12	18.18	10.61	48.48
Attitude of teacher	18.18	4.55	27.27	9.09	40.91
Educational Qualification of Teacher	15.15	16.67	18.18	12.12	37.88
Teaching Experience of Teacher	13.64	10.61	25.76	12.12	37.88
Absence of Appropriate TLM	18.18	9.09	25.76	7.58	39.39
Peer-Peer Relation	12.12	12.12	27.27	4.55	43.94
Pupil-Teacher relation	13.64	12.12	19.70	12.12	42.42
Engagement with community	16.67	7.58	21.21	16.67	37.88
Absence of Guidance and counselling	12.12	3.03	27.27	13.64	43.94

Table 5 reveals that institutional variables showed high influence. Awareness of teachers (48.48% always), school environment (45.45%), teacher attitude (40.91%), and curriculum structure (40.91%) were prominent. Absence of appropriate TLM (39.39%) and guidance services (43.94%) also featured significantly, emphasizing systemic factors in the learning journey. Further, teachers' qualification and experience (37.88%), peer-peer relation (43.94%), student-teacher relation (42.42%), community engagement (37.88%) are also influencing factors in the learning journey of children with learning disability.

### Discussion

The findings of this study provide critical insight into the multifaceted influences on the learning journey of children with specific learning disabilities (SLD), as perceived by elementary school teachers. Psychological factors emerged as the most dominant, with high percentages indicating that attributes like thinking ability, concentration, and motivation critically shape student engagement and academic success. This reinforces existing literature that emphasizes the role of internal cognitive-emotional competencies in learning outcomes for children with SLD.

Institutional factors were also heavily emphasized, particularly the awareness and attitude of teachers, the school environment, and the availability of teaching-learning materials (TLM) and counseling support. These findings suggest that beyond individual capacities, systemic support plays a vital role in fostering an inclusive and effective learning environment.

Parental factors, such as qualification and awareness of SLD, were moderately influential, indicating that family background and involvement can enhance or hinder learning experiences. While socio-economic variables like caste and religion were largely deemed non-influential, family income and location were highlighted as occasional barriers, pointing to structural inequalities that may still subtly affect access to resources and support.

Interestingly, demographic factors such as gender were largely dismissed as irrelevant, which aligns with modern pedagogical approaches advocating for gender-neutral education. However, age was perceived to sometimes influence learning, reflecting developmental variations among children.

This study underscores the critical need for a holistic support system that integrates psychological nurturing, institutional preparedness, and parental engagement to effectively address the needs of children with SLD.

## **Recommendations**

### **For Educators:**

1. **Enhance Teacher Awareness and Training:** Educators should undergo periodic training programs focusing on the identification and management of Specific Learning Disabilities. These workshops should include hands-on strategies for classroom accommodation and case-based learning to better understand diverse learner needs.
2. **Adopt Flexible Pedagogy:** Teachers should employ differentiated instruction, multi-sensory teaching approaches, and formative assessments that allow students to demonstrate their learning in various formats. This ensures that teaching methods align with students' cognitive and emotional profiles.
3. **Foster Supportive Relationships:** Creating a trusting and nurturing classroom environment helps children with SLD feel secure and motivated. Regular feedback, emotional encouragement, and one-on-one support should be integral to the teaching approach.
4. **Use Appropriate TLM and Assistive Technologies:** Teachers must be equipped with tailored teaching-learning materials (TLMs) and assistive devices such as audiobooks, visual aids, or text-to-speech software to support learning across different domains.

### **For Parents:**

1. **Increase Awareness of SLD:** Parents should be provided with educational sessions and resource materials to help them understand the nature of SLD and the importance of early intervention and consistent support.
2. **Active Participation in the Learning Process:** Schools should facilitate regular parent-teacher meetings and workshops where parents can collaborate with educators to co-design individualized learning strategies and monitor progress.

3. **Establish Structured Home Support:** Parents should be guided to establish a conducive home learning environment, offer positive reinforcement, and maintain a predictable routine to enhance consistency between home and school learning.

#### **For Policymakers:**

1. **Mandate SLD Training in Teacher Education Programs:** Teacher education curricula must include mandatory modules on inclusive education and specific strategies for teaching children with SLD. Pre-service and in-service teachers alike should benefit from these additions.
2. **Provide Adequate Resources and Funding:** Policymakers should allocate dedicated funds for schools to access appropriate TLMs, hire special educators, and set up resource rooms and counseling units to support inclusive learning.
3. **Design Inclusive Curriculum and Assessment Policies:** Policies should advocate for curriculum flexibility, alternative assessment models, and certification options that acknowledge the learning styles and pace of children with SLD.

#### **For Other Stakeholders (NGOs, Community Leaders, Administrators):**

1. **Build Inclusive Communities:** Community-based organizations and NGOs should partner with schools to organize awareness campaigns and community engagement programs to eliminate stigma and promote inclusion.
2. **Support Institutional Capacity Building:** NGOs and administrators should assist in strengthening school infrastructure by providing resources like assistive devices, inclusive libraries, and access to mental health professionals.
3. **Monitor and Evaluate Inclusive Practices:** Establish independent bodies or community monitoring committees to evaluate the implementation of inclusive education policies and practices, ensuring transparency and accountability.

By implementing these recommendations, stakeholders can collaboratively build a robust, inclusive educational system that supports the cognitive, emotional, and social development of children with Specific Learning Disabilities.

#### **Conclusion**

Every child has the right to learn irrespective of their abilities, including the disabled ones. Provisions have been made to ensure learning of all categories of children. Despite all the policy and provisions the learning journey of specific learning-disabled children is affected by many factors. In the present study researchers tried to explore the teachers' experience on factors affecting learning of children with SLDs. Findings show that factors like lack of awareness surrounding SLD, the attitudes and perceptions of peers, parents, and educators, the educational background of both parents and teachers, the structure of the curriculum, the absence of suitable teaching and learning materials, the overall school environment, and community engagement. It can be suggested that awareness and sensitization programmes should be organized for both teachers and parents. Resource persons should be engaged to train

the teachers as well as community members to make the learning journey of such children more enjoyable and inclusive. Curriculum should be made flexible and interventions should be implemented for betterment of these children. By addressing these factors, the education system can create a more conducive and empowering learning environment for children with specific learning disabilities, fostering their growth and development in a truly inclusive setting.

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