



**SELINUS UNIVERSITY**  
OF SCIENCES AND LITERATURE

# **SELF-ESTEEM OF DYSLEXIC CHILDREN**

By Nidya V

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## Declaration

The dissertation titled 'Self-Esteem of Dyslexic Children' is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in General Psychology at the Selinus University of Sciences and Literature. I do hereby declare that I, Nidya V, am the sole author of this thesis and its contents are only the result of my own original research and that no part of it has been presented for another degree in this university or elsewhere.

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## Abstract

Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a motivational theory in psychology comprising a five-tier model of human needs. Esteem needs are the fourth level in Maslow's hierarchy. Self-esteem is a person's overall sense of their own value or worth. High self-esteem not only helps in a child's progress, but also protects from the negative consequences of failure. It makes them more emotionally stable and less prone to psychological distress.

Dyslexia is a learning disability which manifests as difficulties in acquiring skills such as reading, spelling, writing, comprehension etc., in spite of average or above average intelligence levels. Self-esteem of dyslexic children is lower than that of neurotypical children. They often face challenges beyond academic performance which includes emotional, behavioural and social problems. Self-esteem during childhood has been proven to have a long-term impact throughout life.

This study aims to explore the various factors that might have an impact on the self-esteem of a dyslexic child. It would shed light on focus areas, thereby improving the quality of childhood and hence the entire life of so many dyslexic children. The study is based on my decade-long experience as a special educator and psychologist. It includes real-life case studies, which might be helpful to understand the real time problems and solutions. It also includes qualitative information gained through informal interactions with dyslexic children and their parents.

People who play a role are parents, teachers, peers and society. The other factors in the child's environment are educational assessment, identification, remedial intervention, educational attainment and co-curricular skills. The factors are all influenced by parents as they are the ones who can take the child for assessment, arrange for remediation or give them a special focus for their other co-curricular strengths. Though there are many aspects and people playing a role in establishing the self-esteem of a dyslexic child, parents play the most important role. The remaining aspects are either determined, managed or influenced by parents, making them the most irreplaceable part of a child's life.

Parental role in shaping a dyslexic child's success is depicted as hierarchical levels within the pyramid. From the bottom of the hierarchy upwards, it starts with parental love and support as the basic needs for a dyslexic child. The child's strengths must be encouraged while weaknesses must be addressed with remedial intervention. Parents should also be the child's voice in school or society, whenever needed. When all these are ensured, the self-esteem of the child will improve, leading to the child becoming a successful adult in future.

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## **CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Background of the Study**

#### **Self-Esteem**

The construct of self-esteem was first described by William James in 1890 as capturing the sense of positive self-regard that develops when individuals consistently meet or exceed the important goals in their lives. More than a century later, the definition of self-esteem that was offered by James continues to be relevant, such that self-esteem is generally considered to be the evaluative aspect of self-knowledge that reflects the extent to which people like themselves and believe they are competent. (Brown 1998)

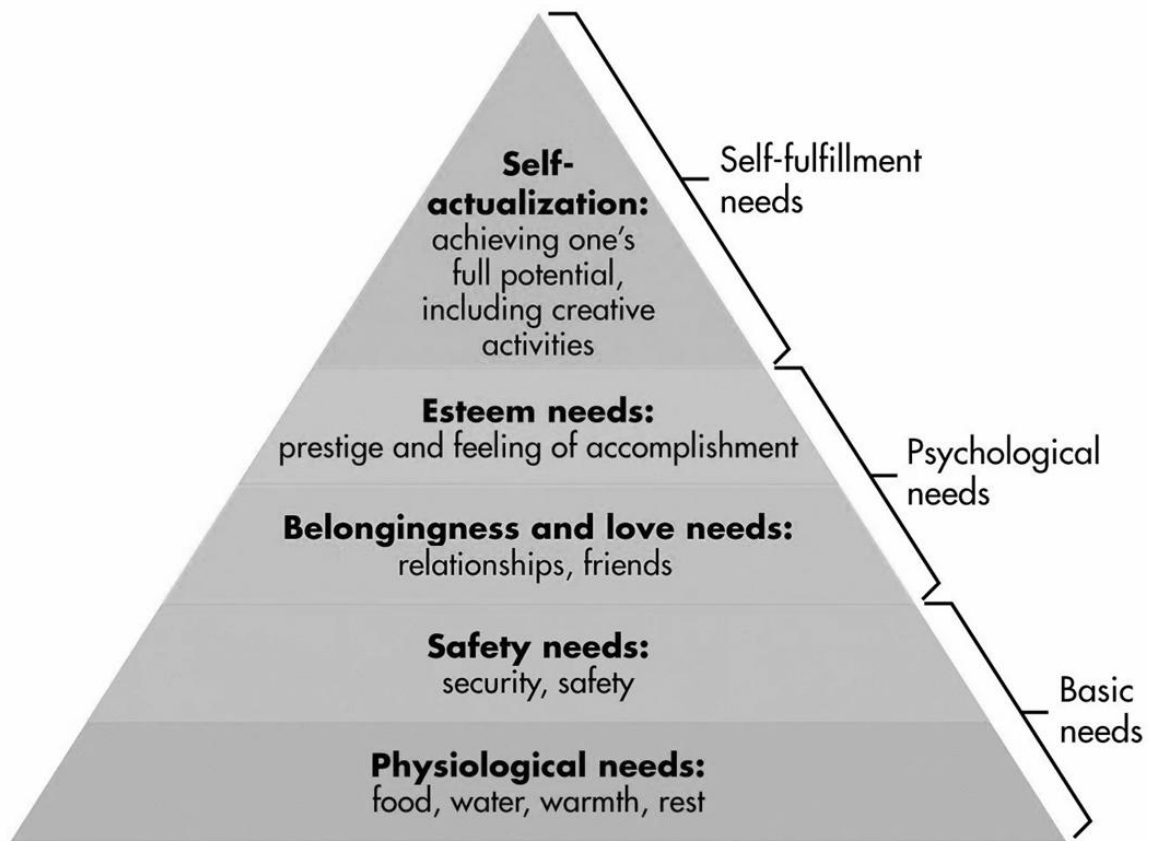
High self-esteem refers to a highly favourable view of the self, whereas low self-esteem refers to evaluations of the self that are either uncertain or outright negative. (Campbell 1996)

Self-esteem is not necessarily accurate or inaccurate. High levels of self-esteem may correlate with an individual's attributes and accomplishments or these feelings of self-worth may have little to do with any sort of objective appraisal of the individual. This is important because self-esteem reflects perception rather than reality.

#### **Maslow's hierarchy of needs**

Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a motivational theory in psychology comprising a five-tier model of human needs, often depicted as hierarchical levels within a pyramid. From the bottom of the hierarchy upwards, the needs are:

physiological, safety, love and belonging needs, self-esteem and self-actualization.



The higher up the hierarchy, the more difficult it is to satisfy the needs associated with that stage, because of the interpersonal and environmental barriers that inevitably frustrate us. Higher needs become increasingly psychological and long-term rather than physiological and short-term, as in the lower survival-related needs.

Esteem needs are the fourth level in Maslow's hierarchy and include self-worth, accomplishment and respect. Self-esteem is a person's overall sense of their own value or worth. Maslow classified esteem needs into two categories:

- (i) esteem for oneself (dignity, achievement, mastery, independence)
- (ii) desire for reputation or respect from others (status, prestige)

Esteem is the typical human desire to be accepted and valued by others. People often engage in a profession or hobby to gain recognition, which gives them a sense of contribution or value. Low self-esteem or an inferiority complex may result from imbalances during this level in the hierarchy. Maslow indicated that the need for respect or reputation is most important for children and adolescents and precedes real self-esteem or dignity.

### **Maslow's hierarchy in a classroom**

Before a student's cognitive needs can be met, they must first fulfil their basic physiological needs. For example, a tired and hungry student will find it difficult to focus on learning. Students need to feel emotionally and physically safe and accepted within the classroom to progress and reach their full potential.

Maslow suggests that students must be shown that they are valued and respected in the classroom and the teacher should create a supportive environment. Students with low self-esteem will not progress academically at an optimum rate until their self-esteem is strengthened.

### **Significance of Self-Esteem**

Individuals with high self-esteem will do well with regard to academic concerns because they may exert more effort and persist in the face of failure. This is important because high self-esteem may protect individuals from the negative consequences of failure, which are very common during the early stages of the learning process. Consistent with this possibility, a number of studies have found that self-esteem is positively correlated with academic performance. (Wylie 1979)

Although there is a clear association between self-esteem and academic achievement, some researchers have argued that the relationship is weaker than it should be, given the value that society places on academic achievement and that self-esteem may actually be a consequence of academic achievement rather than one of its causes. (Baumeister 2003)

Longitudinal studies examining the development of self-esteem and its influence on important life outcomes show that self-esteem is relatively stable and not an immutable trait.

Individuals with relatively high (or low) self-esteem at one stage of life are likely to have relatively high (or low) self-esteem decades later. High self-esteem prospectively predicts success and well-being in life domains such as relationships, work and health.

Self-esteem serves as a resource that protects individuals from potential threats such as rejection or failure. That is, those with high self-esteem are thought to be less affected by negative experiences and to recover from these sorts of experiences more quickly than individuals with low self-esteem. This basic idea has been referred to using a variety of labels, such as the stress-buffering model of high self-esteem and the vulnerability model of low self-esteem. (Zeigler-Hill 2011)

Individuals who report more positive feelings of self-worth are also more emotionally stable and less prone to psychological distress than those who do not feel as good about themselves. (Sedikides 2004)

## **Learning Disability - Dyslexia**

Learning disability is an umbrella term that covers a range of disorders in learning. It manifests as difficulties in acquiring skills such as reading, spelling, writing, comprehension etc, during conventional classroom instruction, in spite of average or above average intelligence levels. It is currently attributed to differences in brain structure and wiring. There are several kinds of learning disabilities, like dyslexia (reading difficulties), dysgraphia (writing difficulties), dyscalculia (math difficulties).

Although it cannot be cured, there are interventions for underlying conditions so that children with learning disabilities can adapt, accomplish academic achievements and live productive and fulfilling lives. (Shapiro 1993)

Though the various forms of learning disabilities can co-occur, Dyslexia is the most common learning disability and nearly 70%-80% of students diagnosed with learning disabilities have deficits in reading. The other areas affected may include memory, attention, organisational skill etc.

It is referred to as a learning disability because dyslexia can make it very difficult for a student to succeed academically in the typical instructional environment and in its more severe forms, will qualify a student for special education, special accommodations or extra support services. (The International Dyslexia Association 2009) Despite possessing normal to above-average intellect, people with dyslexia struggle with reading, writing and spelling. (Leitao 2017)

There's no known way to correct the underlying brain differences that cause dyslexia. However, early detection and evaluation to determine specific needs

and appropriate educational methods and techniques can help the child improve in the areas of difficulty. With the right support, dyslexic individuals can become highly successful students and adults.

### **Prevalence of Dyslexia**

PIB 2025 survey data shows that India's school education system serves 248 million students. According to the Dyslexia Association of India, research showed that 10–15% of Indian children are dyslexic, which brings our count of dyslexic Indian children to at least 24.8 million.

### **Common characteristics of dyslexia**

Dyslexia is often referred to as a hidden disability because it is not visible and the person looks 'normal'. However, it is also hidden because the person with dyslexia is often unaware that they have it.

Most people have one or two of these characteristics. That does not mean that everyone has dyslexia. A person with dyslexia usually has several of these characteristics that persist over time and interfere with his or her learning.

### **Reading**

- Reads below age/grade level
- Reads hesitantly and effortfully
- Difficulty recognising familiar / high-frequency words
- Misreads common words
- Ignores punctuation, e.g. not pausing for commas etc.
- Difficulty remembering and/or understanding text passages
- Difficulty extracting important points from a passage

- Loses place in a line of print
- Skips or re-reads a line of words in a passage
- Leaves out words or adds extra words

### **Writing**

- Spells below age/grade level
- Poor handwriting
- Numerous spelling errors in a piece of work and may spell the same word in several different ways.
- Confuses similar sounding words when spelling, e.g. 'one' and 'won'
- Poor standard of written work compared to oral ability
- Messy, badly organised work
- Has trouble copying from the board in class
- Letters, syllables and words omitted, inserted or placed in the wrong order
- Mixes capital and small letter within words

### **Memory**

- May learn and understand how to do something, but requires frequent reminders before they remember to do it.
- Difficulty remembering multiple-step instructions
- May have excellent long-term memory for experiences, locations and faces, but poor memory for sequences as well as unfamiliar facts and information
- Sequencing difficulties while sorting or ordering information, remembering/executing a list of instructions

## **Speech**

- Late learning to talk
- Difficulty expressing thoughts
- Difficulty finding the words he/she wants to use
- Mispronounces long words or transposes phrases and words

## **Executive Function/Organisation**

- Disorganised, forgets homework, messy desk, loses papers
- Easily frustrated or emotional about school, reading or writing
- Appears bright, but performs poorer than expected in the academic areas
- Has difficulty sustaining attention
- Has a poor sense of direction, confusion between left-right, before-after
- Poor sense of time
- Overwhelmed by too much input

## **Impact of Dyslexia**

During the early primary school years, the synergistic relationship between reading, writing and spoken language is more evident than during the pre-school years. A child who has difficulty in reading is likely to experience academic failure as a result of difficulty in all academic subjects and this is due to the importance of reading in most aspects of academic curricula. (Davis 2010) The overall academic success in higher classes can be predicted with reasonable accuracy by using reading outcomes at early grades. (Torgesen 2002) As a result, a child with a reading disability will fall further and further

behind his/her typically-developing peers due to the pervasive nature of his/her disorder.

While dyslexic children have immense potential owing to their above-average IQ level, the condition often masks their abilities and highlights only their difficulties. It leaves a huge volume of untapped potential. Implications of dyslexia are so critical that if left unattended, we will lose out on the academic success of a huge number of our future generation.

### **Dyslexia vs Self-esteem**

When it comes to the development of their self-image and self-esteem, children with dyslexia confront difficulties. Studies of Khan Zeenat (2016) showed that the self-esteem of dyslexic children is lower than that of neurotypical children. (Neurotypical is a descriptor that refers to someone with brain functions and processing that is considered standard or typical) Dyslexia often manifests during childhood and can significantly impact academic performance and psychosocial development. (Schulte-Körne 2010)

Humphrey and Mullins (2002) reported that dyslexia had noticeable adverse effects on the self-esteem and self-image of children. It was indicated by qualitative data that in schools, dyslexic children felt isolated and up to half were regularly bullied or teased. Ryan's (2004) findings also supported these results.

Dyslexic children had lower academic self-image than children without learning difficulties. Students with specific learning disabilities, such as dyslexia, who attend mainstream classrooms as opposed to special courses,

have much lower levels of self-perception and more negative opinions of themselves. (Baker 1990)

Terras (2009) assessed levels of psycho-social adjustment and self-esteem in children with dyslexia and analysed child and parent attitudes, understanding and the perceived effect of reading disability on everyday life. The average score on both parent and child-rated scholastic competence was considerably lower than that of the general population.

The relationship between emotional symptoms and academic self-esteem was significant and it was proposed that individuals with dyslexia exhibited more emotional, behavioural and social problems and might have lower self-esteem than those without reading problems.

Children with rigorous and constant reading impairments, specifically dyslexia, typically experience significant academic failure and therefore, these children hold negative self-images and feel poor about themselves. (Alexander Passe 2006)

Ingresson (2007) examined the school experiences of youth with dyslexia about their sense of self-worth, happiness, academic success, relationships with peers and optimism about the future.

Many interviews were conducted with the individuals. According to the interviewees, the first six years of school were filled with hardship and disappointment and their self-esteem had suffered because of their dyslexia. Because of their low academic self-esteem in secondary school, most of them opted against going to college and instead selected vocational programs. Several respondents reported having been bullied.

Children with dyslexia often face challenges beyond academic performance, which can lead to negative self-perceptions and reduced self-esteem. (Muhammad 2023)

### **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

While it is established that dyslexic children have low self-esteem, there is a need for more focus on the factors contributing to the low self-esteem of dyslexic children and ways to improve it. Both these aspects need to be analysed in detail to gain a holistic understanding.

### **1.3 Research Objective**

This study aims to explore the various factors that might have an impact on the self-esteem of a dyslexic child. It would shed light on the contributing aspects and also highlight improvement strategies.

### **1.4 Specific Objectives**

The study aims to list and discuss in detail the various aspects of self-esteem of a dyslexic child and then prioritizing these aspects based on the level of impact on the dyslexic child. It also suggests ways of improving self-esteem.

### **1.5 Research Questions**

The research questions that guided the study are:

- What are the factors affecting the self-esteem of a dyslexic child?
- Which of these aspects plays a major role?
- What measures would improve self-esteem?
- Is there a difference in the efficacy of these measures?

## **1.6 Significance of the Study**

Given the increasing evidence that self-esteem has important real-world consequences, the topic of self-esteem development is of considerable societal significance. Self-esteem during childhood has been proven to have a long-term impact throughout life.

The study would shed light on focus areas, thereby improving the quality of childhood and hence the entire life of so many dyslexic children.

## **1.7 Scope of the Study**

Existing literature was reviewed to gain more clarity on each of the considered aspects. The study is based on my decade-long experience as a special educator and psychologist. It includes real-life case studies, which might be helpful to understand the real time problems and solutions. It also includes qualitative information gained through informal interactions with dyslexic children and their parents.

## **1.8 Organisation of the Study**

Chapter 1 gives an introduction to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, self-esteem and its importance. It then introduces dyslexia, a learning disability and its impact on self-esteem. The chapter also discusses the objectives, scope and significance of the study.

Chapter 2 reviews the literature available about various aspects of self-esteem and dyslexia. It discusses the role of self-evaluation, parents, school, society, educational attainment, identification and intervention, co-curricular strengths and dyslexia awareness in shaping the self-esteem of a dyslexic child.

Chapter 3 discusses the methodology used in the study, that is, case studies and the qualitative data through informal interaction.

Chapter 4 presents ten cases and analyses each one in depth to understand the impact of various factors on the self-esteem of the dyslexic child. It also provides the qualitative data obtained from dyslexic children and their parents, to get a better insight.

Chapter 5 discusses the key takeaways derived from the case studies and qualitative data. Chapter 6 presents the conclusion of the study.

## **CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW**

Self-esteem of a dyslexic child is an interplay between various aspects, like self-evaluation of the child, parents, school, which includes teachers and peer classmates, dyslexia awareness in society, identification and intervention, educational attainment and co-curricular activities. The role of each aspect is discussed.

### **2.1 Self-evaluation**

Three stages are proposed in the development of self-evaluation by Stipek. Newborns and very young babies don't have any self-evaluation. In the first stage (1 year), children experience joy in causality, but they lack the cognitive representational skills required for self-evaluation in a self-reflective sense and they do not anticipate others' reactions to their performance.

In the second stage (around 21 months), children anticipate adult reactions, seeking positive reactions to their successes and avoiding negative reactions to failure. Toddlers start to develop an understanding of themselves, what they can do and what makes them who they are.

Sometime around 2 years, children start to refer to themselves using personal pronouns (I, me) and can label themselves in mirrors and photographs. They also start to show signs of feeling emotionally self-conscious, such as embarrassment and guilt. These natural signs suggest that the child has developed the capacity to think and feel things about themselves, that is, they have a self-concept. If we ask young children to describe what they know and feel about themselves, we find their ideas of 'me' to be few and concrete (e.g.

referring to gender, hair colour). At the pre-school level, children often like to compare themselves with others. They might ask whether they're the biggest, fastest or best at whatever they're doing.

The third stage (2 to 5 years) involves a gradual internalization of external reactions, with children beginning to evaluate their performance and react emotionally to success and failure independently of their expectations of adult reactions. (Stipek 1992)

Preschool children tend to exhibit overly optimistic self-evaluations (Lipko 2009), even when confronted with actual information about their deficiencies (Dweck 1983). This tendency may be understood in light of the cognitive limitations that characterize these ages, as well as the tendency to make judgments that are consistent with one's desires. (Stipek 1984)

Studies have proved that three-year-olds were able to make inter-group comparisons and the five-year-old children showed markedly high self-evaluations. (Yee 1992)

At school, children might compare themselves with their friends and classmates. At this age, self-evaluation tends to relate to many things, including how well children learn, how they look, how they do at sports and how easily they make friends.

Around 8 years of age, more substantial self-evaluations like personality traits and self-worth are expressed in self-descriptions. In middle childhood and early adolescence (ages 6–12), children's self-evaluations become increasingly more realistic (Ruble 1991) as they gain more life experience and acquire

cognitive abilities that allow them to make relative evaluations of themselves and of others, simultaneously. (Harter 2015)

Thus, self-concept expands throughout childhood, building from concrete self-knowledge to abstract evaluative reflection. (Ross 2016)

In line with the stages of self-evaluation, studies have shown that dyslexic children were happy and well-adjusted at the preschool stage. Emotional problems began to develop when they entered schooling. The decline in self-evaluations from childhood to adolescence has been evidenced in dyslexic children.

If the early reading instruction was not effective, over the years, students with dyslexia may develop increasing frustration when the reading skills of their classmates begin to surpass their own. Although dyslexic children primarily face problems in learning and academic performance, these students also face increased emotional, behavioural and social problems compared to their peers without any learning difficulties. (Gallegos 2012)

The UK's All-Party Parliamentary Group for Dyslexia and Other Specific Learning Difficulties (2019) survey found that 95% of parents of children with dyslexia said that their children experienced frustration because of their poorly supported dyslexia, 88% said that their children had poor self-esteem, 84% said that they suffered from anxiety and 78% said that their children felt embarrassed.

## **2.2 Parents**

Parents have an important role in the formation of self-concept in children. Children who receive positive treatment, who are directed and advised by

parents when they make mistakes, will have a positive self-concept. It arises from good self-qualities, no hesitation in acting, daring to try and daring to make decisions. Children who receive unpleasant treatment from their parents, often scolded for their mistakes, will have a negative self-concept. It arises from the poor quality of self-adjustment, doubts in oneself, fear of trying and not daring to make decisions. (Rohmalimna 2022)

Negative feedback from parents while receiving bad grades, for example, may contribute to children developing a poor self-concept or poor self-esteem. (Boyes 2018) Parents have a remarkable power to preserve or damage the self-esteem of a child. Experts say that 80% of a learning difference is about managing anxiety, low self-esteem and frustration with learning. When a child feels stressed, overwhelmed or discouraged, their ability to focus and engage in learning decreases.

Improving self-esteem, reducing anxiety around learning and understanding frustration can significantly enhance a dyslexic child's ability to engage and learn effectively. However, other factors also play a role, including the learning environment (e.g., noise levels and distractions), dyslexia-related challenges (such as processing verbal information and short-term memory difficulties) and teaching methods.

Research has shown that children of supportive and involved parents often perform better at school and are generally more resilient than others in the face of learning challenges. Parent attitude to education, participation in daily reading activities and potential to talk to teachers are very important factors that help a child overcome their problems with dyslexia. (Piao 2024) Parents

also face many challenges in raising and controlling children with dyslexia.

(Rauf 2020) The most prominent challenges include:

- The limited knowledge or understanding of children with dyslexia by the general public makes it difficult for parents tasked with raising children with dyslexia.
- Parents find it difficult to access reasonably priced centres for intervention programs as most programs and centres are expensive or inaccessible to these parents.
- There are limited support programs for children with dyslexia, thereby shifting the entire responsibility to parents to confront the challenges of children with dyslexia.
- Due to limited intervention programs, support and limited awareness of dyslexia by parents, they are often characterized as having inadequate skills in handling children with dyslexia.
- The educational system offers different types of curricula and boards along with different challenges in each, making it difficult and confusing for parents to decide on the child's school and education.
- In certain cases, parents experience tantrums and outbursts of behaviour from their children with dyslexia due to frustration or anger, thereby alarming and deterring parents from gaining the required support and skills for their children.
- In most cases, parents feel a sense of low self-esteem towards their children, which is a demoralizing factor that hinders parents from providing the necessary support and care to their children.

- Teachers have limited knowledge of dyslexia, making it difficult for them to communicate about the disability appropriately to the parents. As such, parents find it difficult to prepare and continue to raise their children from an early stage.

From mothers' perspectives, many children hold their stress, anxiety and frustration during the school day and release it in the safety of home through what several described as a 'meltdown' consisting of both externalizing (e.g., lashing out) and internalizing (e.g., crying, irritability, school refusal) behaviour. Many mothers perceived school to be an environment that highlighted their child's difficulties and minimised their strengths. (Wilmot 2023)

### **2.3 School – Teachers and Peers**

'School struggle' for dyslexic children means being overwhelmed by the workload, stressed by the pace of the learning, confused about what's going on, frustrated and annoyed by the impact that their reading difficulties have on their ability to do their work.

The child with dyslexia, in spite of average or above-average intelligence, may have difficulty in grasping abstract concepts and in retelling a story. They may be slow at word recall and have difficulty in reading accuracy. The unfortunate consequence is that a sufferer may have to read a paragraph 3 or 4 times before they can grasp its content.

Spelling is another major problem in the classroom. Children with dyslexia may spell the same word differently even in the same essay. All these difficulties lead to frustration and delays, necessitating an extra time for

reading, writing and other scholarly activities. Because they have to work much harder in school to catch up with their classmates, their self-esteem drops, sometimes to a seriously low level. Such children come to believe that they are stupid. These problems can be worsened by teasing from classmates. (Lamki 2012)

Children with dyslexia face perceived threats to their self-esteem within the school environment and many feel stressed, confused, annoyed and embarrassed by their learning challenges. (Singer 2005) Feelings of isolation, stupidity and being different are key experiences for children with dyslexia, many of whom report being bullied and teased. (Glazzard 2010)

Unfavourable social comparisons between dyslexic and their non-dyslexic peers in an inclusive classroom may arise from class teachers and peers not being aware of the child being dyslexic. On the contrary, knowledge of a child's dyslexia may also result in comforting feedback from teachers. (Rattan 2012)

Children with dyslexia who attend mainstream schools have lower self-esteem than children who attend specialist dyslexia schools and often make negative statements regarding their academic ability in comparison to their peers (Humphrey 2002)

Students with learning disabilities frequently perceive themselves as capable than their teachers judge them to be. (Meltzer 1998) But the dyslexic label was found to affect teachers' perceptions and actions. Many felt sorry for the students; some perceived them as not only more difficult to teach but also less intelligent. Many negative perceptions by teachers were due to the negotiation

between student and teacher about reasonable accommodations and the teacher questioning the validity of a non-visible disability. (Frymier 2003)

Even though studies suggest dyslexics work themselves to exhaustion and illness to achieve at the level of their peers, some teachers hold belief that the label 'dyslexic' is an excuse to get out of work and laziness or not trying hard enough. (Lock 2001)

A study of Foster (1977) found that teachers perceived more deviance when the child was labelled learning disabled than when he was labelled normal. In a study with regular and special education teachers, it was found that teachers apparently perceived a child described with a label as having more severe academic or behavioral problems and required more intensive special services than the same child described without a label. (Gillung 1977) It may be detrimental to a child's academic progress.

While parents and school play an important role individually, there's also a collaborative role that has an impact on the child.

Perceptions of a positive family-school relationship were an important protective factor for the mental health of children and their mothers. Having teachers and principals who were caring, responsive to parent's suggestions and interested to learn more about how best to support a child with dyslexia were highly valued. For many, these attitudes and personality factors seemed to be more important than how much teachers already knew about dyslexia. Positive feedback from parents and teachers who understand dyslexia provides emotional support to the dyslexic child. (Haft 2016)

Emotional well-being is vulnerable in dyslexic children, particularly those for whom their dyslexia was missed or poorly supported at school, leading to repeated academic failure. (Glazzard 2010) Studies highlight the importance of children's relationships with parents, friends and teachers. (Wilmot 2023)

#### **2.4 Dyslexia Awareness in Society**

Lack of understanding about dyslexia by the public brings negative impacts to dyslexic individuals, such as causing unwanted misunderstanding, mental stress to the dyslexics and bringing negative impact to their learning processes. (Subramaniyan 2020) People had negative assumptions about individuals with dyslexia and they judged and treated them differently. (Hafez 2023)

Stigmatization towards dyslexics occurs due to a lack of knowledge and personal beliefs without familiarity, which lead to misconceptions that are unfair to the recipients. Studies have shown the importance of awareness and education in clearing up myths and misconceptions and they highlight the urgent need for better support strategies. Emphasis was on more involvement from parents and teachers and shared responsibility to create a more inclusive environment. (Zaini 2024)

From a biological and medical perspective, dyslexia is seen as a natural neurological variation (neurodiversity), whereby individuals process information and learn in differing ways from those who are neurotypical. Societal barriers, including prejudice, stigma, a lack of thorough understanding and social exclusion, can all prevent neurodiverse individuals from leading a fulfilling life. (Kauffman 2013) Whilst a minority, it should be

noted that some dyslexics may withdraw from a society, which they feel ill-skilled to participate in. (Scott 2004)

## **2.5 Identification and Intervention**

Children with dyslexia perceive a stronger relationship between intelligence and reading ability than children without dyslexia and therefore are more likely to feel unintelligent. (Humphrey 2002)

Leit (2017) suggested that negative self-perceptions in children with dyslexia may be more common prior to assessment, when children attribute their lack of progress to them being 'lazy', 'dumb' and 'different' from their peers. Following an assessment, these children may explain their academic difficulties in terms of dyslexia rather than their own intellectual failing. If dyslexia is not identified in childhood but academic difficulties continue, then individuals are more likely to question their intellectual ability, leading to lower estimated IQ amongst readers with dyslexia who are assessed as adults. (Gibson 2010)

A formal diagnosis of dyslexia can be protective of self-esteem, possibly because it facilitates self-understanding and/or social support. (Leit 2017) Receiving a diagnosis can also promote pride, a positive dyslexic identity and non-stigmatizing language (difference not deficit) to self-advocate and explain dyslexia to peers. A dyslexia diagnosis provides an acceptable explanation for a child's difficulties in reading, spelling or writing, compared to negative concepts of laziness. (Taylor 2010) This may reflect greater awareness of dyslexia through advocacy groups and the media and a recognition that there can be strengths as well as weaknesses in dyslexia.

According to Armstrong (2009), a dyslexia assessment in late adolescence or adulthood, by which time self-identity is largely fixed, is more likely to result in a reduction in academic motivation and outcomes. Adults with dyslexia can learn to read, but confidence issues can begin in childhood. By the time they are in fourth to sixth grade, if they're still failing, their motivation to continue drops off and they feel disengaged. The consequences of not being able to read are huge. Anxiety-related symptoms were more often experienced by those who had a late dyslexia diagnosis. (Arnalds 2024)

After identification, children get into the process of remedial intervention to bridge the learning gaps. Remedial intervention is systematic. It identifies the strengths and needs of the child. It is individualized and multi-sensory. Interventions may include teaching reading and writing, phonics, study skills etc. For students with dyslexia or at risk for dyslexia, every extra hour of intervention helped improve outcomes. (Hall 2023)

Special attention and encouragement are given to dyslexic children by those who are aware of it. These encouragements may come from three sources – parents, teachers in their school and educational therapists in their specialist remediation classrooms. They may praise and afford them special attention to highlight their achievements and progress.

Studies have investigated how non-disabled peers viewed students being removed for intervention sessions without the use of labels for difficulties. (Bak 1987) Dyslexic students were sent to the resource room or the special needs room during school hours. Results indicated that students were

sensitive about students who leave classrooms during the day. The absence of formal labels did not prevent children from forming negative expectations about special class children's academic limitations. Those students were aware of the differences and perceived removal for intervention in a negative manner.

## **2.6 Educational attainment**

Educational attainment is defined as the highest level of education an individual has completed, which can include high-school diplomas, vocational training or post-secondary degrees. Dyslexic students are at a higher risk of lower educational attainment than their peers without dyslexia. (Snowling 2012)

Dyslexic students, by nature of their condition, often encounter significant difficulties in academic areas that heavily rely on strong reading and writing skills. The cumulative impact of these challenges may result in a reluctance to pursue post-secondary education or a decision to discontinue their educational journey prematurely. Ingesson (2007) found that younger adolescents (7–13 years) were particularly vulnerable to low self-esteem as a result of their dyslexia, making them feel different and inferior.

Those who were diagnosed at an early age, in general, did not show symptoms of anxiety and were more likely to have continued their studies than those who were diagnosed as teenagers. Providing support to children with reading difficulties at an early age can prevent future anxiety and school drop-out. (Arnalds 2024). Olalekan (2025) highlights the need for targeted interventions,

specialized support services and evidence-based strategies to enhance educational outcomes for the dyslexic population.

Students with dyslexia were just as likely as nondisabled students to complete their course modules in universities. Around 40% of them obtained good grades. (Richardson 2015) Dyslexia may have deleterious consequences for progression, completion and achievement in higher education, but it is by no means incompatible with a high level of success, given appropriate commitment on the part of the students and appropriate resources on the part of their institution. (Richardson 2003). Pullen (2016) highlighted the need for greater awareness, understanding and support for dyslexic students in the educational system.

## **2.7 Co-curricular activities**

Holistic development of children requires interventions that extend beyond conventional academic instruction. Co-curricular activities, including art, music, sports, dramatics and group-based tasks, have emerged as effective tools to enhance cognitive, social, emotional and physical growth in these children. (Pillay 2024)

Social development is achieved when children engage in group tasks, interact with peers and learn cooperative behaviors that foster inclusion (Thouin 2020). Emotional development is nurtured through activities that promote creativity, self-expression and positive reinforcement, thereby reducing anxiety and behavioral difficulties (Dymond 2020). Physical development, on the other hand, is strengthened through sports, yoga and movement-based

exercises that enhance fine and gross motor skills, coordination and overall health. (Eastling 2021)

Co-curricular activities can make a huge difference in lives of children with special needs. These activities can enhance learning while offering ways for students to express themselves and explore their strengths.

Lithari (2019) writes about young adults repairing their fractured self-perception only once they have left the academic pressures of compulsory education. This may be achieved through the recognition of real-world (non-literacy-based) achievements. (Doiku 2015)

If a child is continually struggling or failing at school, an extra-curricular activity that they enjoy can be a good way to develop self-esteem. Hobby activities like sports, art etc can have a very positive effect. Physical activities like football, karate or gymnastics can also help coordination, release frustration and allow children to develop confidence in their own abilities. Regardless of what it is, some form of activity away from school that a child can enjoy and succeed at can be very beneficial. Co-curricular activities serve as a means to express themselves outside of the classroom, which can help them feel successful about accomplishing something differently.

## **CHAPTER 3 – METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Case Study**

This thesis is majorly based on case studies. Ten different cases of dyslexic children that the researcher has encountered during her career as a special educator and psychologist are presented. The case details are based on the first-hand experience of the researcher. Cases are chosen in such a way as to present ten unique scenarios that cannot be replicated experimentally.

These case studies attempt to answer 'how' and 'why' questions and for studying unique situations faced by each dyslexic child referred in the case. Each case is analysed in-depth and backed up with evidence-based reasoning, thereby providing scope to gather suggestions and insights from each case.

### **3.2 Informal Interaction**

Qualitative data from dyslexic children and their parents was gathered through one-to-one informal interactions with them. While formal interviews or self-esteem questionnaires would have quantified the data, it was avoided intentionally as not to hurt the child's emotions or give them any unwanted thoughts through statements like 'I often feel that if they could, my parents would trade me in for another child' (Hare self-esteem scale), 'All in all, I'm inclined to think that I am a failure' (Rosenberg self-esteem scale).

Also, the researcher believes that such non-compelling, informal interactions aid in honest sharing of thoughts and opinions by the children. The gathered qualitative data is more reliable as it is the children themselves who have provided information based on their own experiences.

## CHAPTER 4 – CONTENTS

### **Case 1**

*Vani had just completed Grade 2. She was reading below grade level. Her parents immediately brought her to remediation class and also ensured that she attended the classes regularly. She was already into remediation when her dyslexia was identified. She never missed any sessions and by the end of Grade 3, she showed a huge improvement and was reading at grade level. Remediation was stopped and she continued with the regular schooling.*

### **LSRW**

The LSRW (Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing) model for language acquisition was proposed by J. A. Bright, emphasising a sequential learning approach where listening to a language comes first, followed by speaking, then reading and finally writing, for effective learning of the English language.

### **Reading is an acquired skill**

Reading is not a skill that develops on its own, like standing or walking. Human brains are naturally wired to speak; they are not naturally wired to read and write. Reading and writing are acquired skills for which the human brain is not yet fully evolved. (Lieberman 1989) The child has to be exposed to printed language and words must be taught. Only then can a child read.

We are not born with a reading centre in the brain. In order to read, we have to create an interface in our brain between our visual system and our language

system, specifically, the sound system of language (phonology). To do this, the brain repurposes a part of the visual system (left occipito-temporal region) for letter and word recognition and connects that part to the speech and language centres of the brain.

The brain does not make these changes and connections naturally. It happens when the children are exposed to print form and the language is taught to them. They need to practice reading and spelling until they become fluent and automatic. Certain disabilities like dyslexia make this process of repurposing and connecting harder. (Dahaene 2009)

### **Importance of Reading**

Reading is a gateway to all subjects. Even in a subject like mathematics, where numbers are involved, word problems do need reading and comprehension skills. Hence, the importance of reading is never to be underestimated. Reading is not just sounding out words; it is making sense of language, noticing patterns, building knowledge and forming ideas. From the beginning, readers are using everything they know – phonics, background knowledge, vocabulary and language to make meaning.

### **Learning to Read → Reading to Learn**

During kindergarten and the early primary years, children acquire a variety of skills; however, the focus is on learning-to-read. When they begin the late primary period around Grade 3, the emphasis shifts to reading-to-learn. The curriculum assumes that children can read fluently and understand the

content of school subjects such as social studies, science and mathematical word problems. Though learning to read and reading to learn should be happening simultaneously and continuously, from preschool through middle school, the timely transition from learning-to-read to reading-to-learn occurs for most children at about age 8 or 9. (Francis 1996)

Before Grade 3, all children might still be in the 'Learning to read' stage. When remediation is initiated at an early stage, it takes less time to catch up, as the expected grade level is also lower. So, the lag might not be noticed. As in this case, the child was not even aware that she is performing below her grade level. It was rectified before the deficits in reading started to affect the self-esteem and confidence of the child.

But, once the child goes beyond Grade 3, content and workload increase and they are expected to move on to the 'Reading to learn' stage. That is, the child is supposed to read and learn new things through his/her reading. Reading practice is most often stopped at this stage in schools and they start to focus more on the content and writing skill, expecting elaborate and long answers. 74 percent of children who were poor readers at the end of third grade were likely to still be poor readers by the time they reached the end of ninth grade. (Shaywitz 1996)

### **Reading levels**

Three different reading levels (independent, instructional and frustration) were identified by Word reading accuracy (WRA) and reading comprehension scores

(Betts 1946). The highest level, with higher than 98% of WRA and at least 85% of comprehension, was the independent level. The level with at least 95% of WRA and 75% of comprehension was classified as the instructional level. The level with less than 90% of WRA or 50% of reading comprehension was categorised as the frustration level.

Independent-level material is material that the student reads fluently without difficulty. Students can use independent-level material when reading for enjoyment. Ultimately, we want students to read independently at their grade level. A student's instructional reading level is the level at which a student can read with support from a teacher and/or program.

### **Grade level vs Child's reading level**

Exposing kids to grade-level text will not automatically raise student learning. The child's textbook must be at least at the instructional level of the child, for the child to understand the content with some help from teachers and parents. But a dyslexic child with reading difficulties is always at the frustration level when compared to the reading level expected in a particular grade. The child will never understand the content.

Few children tend to compensate for the lack of reading with extra effort to memorise the answers and reproduce them in the test. Though this is not the right way, it works till Grades 1 or 2 when the content for answers is very little. But as the content grows higher, it is not possible to memorise all the answers and marks start reducing. In higher grades, the dyslexic child who

has not yet attained sufficient reading skills will be expected to move on to writing skills, against the sequence of LSRW. This will add to the burden and will start reflecting in the day-to-day school activities and exams.

There are many scientific tools and methods to establish a child's present level of reading in terms of grade level or reading levels. From a parent's point of view, the easiest way would be to check if the child can read his/ her textbook. This would be a simple, quick check to know if the child is at par with the expectations of her grade. This can be done throughout the year intermittently or at least at the end of the year.

### **Early remediation - More important than identification**

Identification of dyslexia is sometimes considered as labelling the child. But one has to understand that this label is only to provide a better understanding of the child's difficulties and to give her the necessary support. Even without the identification of dyslexia, it is helpful to provide the necessary support for the reading lag and difficulties faced by the child. In most cases, parents think that the child is not taking enough effort or that the child is still at a primary grade level and there is no hurry and it's not a big issue if the child is not reading.

If the child is not at grade level, help must be given immediately. If left unattended, the child may progress to higher grades and can complete at least primary schooling (owing to the 'No detention' policy of the government), but without any basic skills required for further grade levels.

Most children learn through the basic teaching methods available to them at school. While this may benefit the neurotypical children, who would be the majority, dyslexic children might not be able to learn in the way that everyone else does. They might need explicit instruction, intensive phonics training, grammar sessions and help in any other areas that they might have problems with. But to seek such help, one must first identify that there is a lag in reading.

As the delay for remediation increases, the time that would be needed for remediation would also keep increasing, in addition to the missed content which the child would not have been able to understand, diminishing self-confidence. In this case, early identification and remediation had played a significant role in preserving the child's self-confidence and esteem.

## **Case 2**

*Suja was about to complete Grade 4 when her parents were told that she was dyslexic. She attended remediation classes. When she got a good grasp on short vowel sounds and a few sight words, she stopped attending remediation classes.*

*After a few months, she came back in Grade 5. She had forgotten all the short vowel sounds that she had learnt earlier, as there was no recall or practice in the intermittent period. She was taught again from the short vowel sounds and then proceeded to the long vowel sounds, when she again stopped coming to classes.*

*The next year, she came back and informed that she had been retained in Grade 5, citing the reason that she lacked the basic academic skills needed for Grade 6 and would not be able to cope up with the work load. The child was completely upset with the retention to the level of avoiding eye contact with any person.*

### **Reading as a prerequisite**

Suja was in Grade 4 when she came for the first time for remediation, which means that she had undergone six years of schooling, including kindergarten. In schools, generally the alphabets are taught at the kindergarten level along with simple sight words, gradually proceeding on to other sound and multisyllabic words. Grade 4 also means that she had come to the 'Reading to learn' stage, where she might be expected to read by herself, understand the concepts and write answers with her own sentences.

Simply put, reading is no longer a skill in itself; it's just a prerequisite. Lack of such a prerequisite will hinder the child from gaining knowledge in all subjects, which would have reflected in the child's marks as well. So, there is an initial delay in the first place. To add more to that, remediation was stopped in between.

### **Remediation takes time**

Remediation for short duration have been insufficient to yield dramatic gains in students with severe reading difficulties, even with high quality teaching. (McMaster 2005)

Dyslexic children need more practice and repetitions in addition to the differentiated teaching methods. When remediation is stopped, not only is the progress stopped, but also the withering away of the content that was learned in the first phase of remediation happens. Any skill needs practice for a considerable amount of time to become automatic. But, if we choose to stop practising it, it may never be transferred to the long-term memory and never become automatic. Even if the child had learnt all the sounds, there must be practice and repetition to bring fluency and automaticity of the reading skill.

Huey (1908) described students' progress from the beginner stage, where readers' close attention is needed for word recognition, to the fluent reading stage, where words can be recognised automatically with speed and accuracy. That is, the more skilled readers are, the more speedily and accurately they recognise words in reading. Spelling is more difficult than reading. Reading

requires recognition, while spelling involves production. Success in reading does not automatically lead to success in writing. It needs more practice. (Rayner 2001)

In this case, remediation was stopped even before the child had mastered all the sounds. The next phase of remediation, when the child came back in Grade 5, was not just a continuation from where it was stopped, but an initiation from the start. It was reteaching and relearning again from the basics and then proceeding to the actual new content.

Another drawback was that the child had moved to the next grade level, thereby increasing the grade level expectation and had also missed out on some more content which she was supposed to have learnt in the earlier grades.

The third time the child came back, she had undergone a severe setback in terms of her self-confidence and self-esteem. To be detained in the same grade when all her classmates have moved on to the next grade would hugely affect the child. To bring back the child from a state of shock and embarrassment to a stage of learning was by itself a great challenge.

Surveys of children's ratings of twenty stressful life events in the 1980s showed that, by the time they were in 6th grade, children feared retention most after the loss of a parent and going blind. When this study was replicated in 2001, 6th-grade students rated grade retention as the single most stressful

life event, higher than the loss of a parent or going blind. (Anderson 2002) This change in result is likely influenced by the academic pressures on children.

These kinds of experiences leave a mark on the child forever and can continue to haunt the child even after so many years. She might not feel good even if anything remotely reminds it.

### **Grade promotion vs Grade retention**

Retaining the child in the same grade without providing any necessary support wouldn't be of any use. As a quote says, 'If a child with dyslexia is held back and the intervention is the same as the year before, he/ she will not improve. The intervention has to change, not the child.' If the child just repeats the same grade without any proper intervention, nothing would change.

Research has failed to demonstrate the benefits of grade retention over promotion to the next grade for any group of students. Instead, we must focus on implementing evidence-based prevention and intervention strategies to promote cognitive competence and facilitate the academic success of all students. (Gabrielle 2002)

But these students, if promoted to the next grade, face daily failure because of the cumulative effects of poor learning at lower grades. They internalise that they are good for nothing and can never do well in academics. As a result, they not only develop poor academic self-concept but also encounter failure. So, no-detention delays failure. This delayed failure gets reflected in the results of

a higher grade, where the incidence of failure is not just increasing, but also their chances of getting future academic success gets minimal. (Agarwal 2014)

Parents' negligence was the main reason for the child's suffering in this case. They never took the issue as a serious concern until the child was retained in the same grade.

The child got stuck at a tricky point where both options, grade promotion and grade retention, had its own drawbacks. The retention just aided in buying time for remediation to take place and to stop adding further workload and content to the already frustrated child. But it came with a huge cost of wasting a whole year, repeating a grade, while also shattering the child's self-esteem. Had the parents given importance in the initial stages, it would not have gone this far. In addition to the lost time, added content load and extra remediation time, the shame that the child had experienced was painful.

### **Case 3**

*Ragini was in Grade 3. Her reading and writing were very much below her grade level and she was identified as dyslexic. The need for remediation was suggested to the parents. After sending the child for remedial classes for 3 months, parents felt that time cannot be wasted on the basic skills and sent her to tuition instead of remediation.*

At tuition, a child would do the homework at the grade level with the tutor's help, without any of the basic foundational and pre requisite skills needed to understand the work. She would memorize as much as possible for exams and continue to score less.

### **Tuition**

It is a good option for a child who is almost at grade level, but needs some help and supervision in completing her homework and to stay on track with the school's pace of completion of the syllabus.

Tuition teachers are more often school teachers who are specialised in teaching a single subject at school, but good enough to help the child with the other subjects also. This type of tuitions would only be applicable for children in lower classes, may be up to primary or middle grade levels, depending on the knowledge and ability of the teachers.

When the child goes to higher classes, say from Grade 9, tuition teachers are more specialized and deal with a single subject which they have graduated in

at college. They tend to focus more on the exam-based, mark-scoring approach as required for the board exams.

### **Remedial intervention**

Remedial intervention is completely different from tuition. It focusses on the basic foundational skills that a child needs in order to learn and understand the concepts that would be taught in higher classes.

Remedial teaching refers to specialised instructions designed to help students who are lagging academically in the 3 Rs in school -reading, writing, arithmetic. Unlike mainstream teaching, which assumes a baseline level of knowledge, remedial education revisits core concepts in subjects like maths and language to build foundational understanding.

It differs from regular instruction by focusing on where students are, not where the curriculum expects them to be. These interventions are highly targeted and flexible, often personalized to address each learner's unique difficulties. Students may need remedial help if they missed key learning steps due to learning issues. Their primary goal is to bridge foundational gaps.

Remedial classes go back to basics, helping students understand things they should already know. It is basically clarifying the basic foundational concepts that the child had been unable to learn in the initial stages and bridging the learning gaps to make the child level up to grade level. It boosts learner confidence, enhances academic engagement and reduces dropouts. Consistent academic failure is a key factor behind school dropouts. Remedial

education helps institutions retain students by offering second chances to succeed.

Remediation in language may include phonics, basic grammar, spelling, comprehension etc and remediation in maths may include the basic number concepts, arithmetic operations etc, as required by the child. This remedial intervention would be provided by a special educator through an individualized method of teaching to suit the learner, thereby minimizing and closing the learning gaps as early as possible. Gradually, when the child fits at his/her grade level, remediation can be stopped.

Remediation intervention may also include teaching about study techniques, planning and organizational skills, time management etc, to the child, as per the requirement of the child. This might also involve equipping and guiding the parent on how to help the child in regular school activities and bring the best out of their children.

Remedial teaching is all about empathetic intelligence. It is a combination of cognitive and emotional intelligence, as the teacher understands the child, adapts teaching methods and techniques to suit the child's needs, works on improving his/ her skills, in a learning environment that maximizes the child's learning. (Jayasree 2016)

### **Dyslexic child needs remedial intervention**

Dyslexic children receive a personalised approach which recognises the needs and pace of the learners. These are easy to implement individually or in a

small group setting characteristic of these remediation classes. It helps in two ways. One is via direct encouragement and affirmation. Two is via the implementation of specialist teaching approaches in a more learner-friendly environment.

Although the goal of is not to raise self-esteem and provide emotional support, it may nevertheless lead to an indirect positive impact on academic self-concept. This calls for better identification of dyslexic children and the provision of timely remediation support. (Oei 2016)

During remediation, the child may actually be learning and improving, but to have effects on marks will take time. The content that the child is expected will be at the actual grade level whereas the child's initial starting point before remediation would be much below that level. It would take more time to compensate for the lost years. There may be improvement, but not sufficient to match the actual grade level.

The higher the grade level, the greater the gap and hence longer the time taken to compensate. This period has to be well understood and supported by parents for the child to stay motivated during the remediation. Even the smallest improvement must be acknowledged.

In this case, the child's parents, even after getting sufficient counselling on the need for remediation, opt to choose the tuition. This tendency to make things work out in the short term and not focus on long term implications is highly detrimental to the child. Mere completion of homework and dragging

along the school activities wouldn't be of any actual use. It can only postpone remediation and frustrate the child in the intermittent period.

No matter how hard the child tries, she won't be able to manage for long. She might get accustomed to the low marks and label herself as a poor performer. Such children tend to become drop-outs too after certain years of continuous unfruitful hard work.

Longitudinal studies show that students with poor reading skills in earlier grades do not catch up with their peers who are good readers. In reading, the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. There is a widening gap between slow starters and fast starters.

The children who are reading well and who have good vocabularies will read more, learn more word meanings and hence read even better. Children with inadequate vocabularies, who read slowly and without enjoyment, read less and as a result have slower development of vocabulary knowledge, which inhibits further growth in reading ability. (Stanovich 1986)

The parents might eventually realize that tuition won't correct the lag in the basic foundational skills and may get her back to remediation. But precious time would have been lost and the content load would have increased at the higher grades, thereby widening the learning gap. Remediation would take much longer than it would have at the initial stages.

#### **Case 4**

*Peter was in Grade 3 when he got diagnosed with dyslexia and ADHD. His academic performance was poor in all subjects. He was brought to the remediation class. He was familiar with the English alphabet but unable to read/spell simple CVC words or sight words. His second language was Tamil, in which he was not fluent with the alphabet. With respect to Maths, he was able to recite numbers orally but had confusion with number concepts and basic operations (addition, subtraction, multiplication, division).*

*All his test marks were in the single digit out of 100. He never attempted any written response and only scored through MCQs. Parents said, 'If only he moves on from single-digit to double-digit marks, we would be so happy.'*

*After a few months of remedial intervention, he started reading and answering fill-ups, match-type questions and started scoring marks in double digits. Then his parents said, 'Only if he gets a pass mark, that's sufficient.'*

*The child kept on improving with continuous remediation and got pass marks in all subjects. Parents then said, 'Shouldn't he at least score 50% in all subjects?'*

*When the child achieved it, parents said, 'Without 90%, how would he be eligible for professional courses?' He has the potential, but is not working hard.'*

#### **Remediation is a compensation, not a cure**

Most parents forget where the child started from. In this case, the child just knew the English alphabets and everything else was taught in remediation

class from scratch. There are lots of challenges that a dyslexic child faces and not everything can be rectified or remediated. If it had been so, it would not have been named as a learning disability and the government wouldn't have provided accommodations and concessions at the board exam level.

Dyslexia is not just about reading and writing difficulties. It has an impact on memory, processing speed, executive functions and many more aspects of the child. Few deficits, like reading, are relatively easier to remediate, whereas other aspects, like working memory, don't actually improve through remediation. The child is only taught to manage with weak working memory and make the best use of it. The strengths and weaknesses vary from child to child.

Children with dyslexia also experience persistent difficulty with automaticity and fluency. Learning phonics through explicit and systematic instruction is an essential starting point for early readers. Although many students with dyslexia can develop accurate word recognition skills, they continue to struggle to read words with fluency, which is necessary for understanding the meaning of the text. They aren't able to transition their phonics knowledge to flexible, automatic and fluent use. So, they continue to have persistent difficulty in reading words quickly and effortlessly (automatically) and in spelling them.

The National Reading Panel (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000) noted that reading fluency, defined as the ability to read with speed, accuracy and expression, is a critical component of skilled

reading. Cognitive resources are inherently limited and reading requires two central tasks (i.e., word recognition and comprehension) to be performed simultaneously. If readers have not developed automaticity in word recognition, a large degree of their cognitive resources will be dedicated to decoding, leaving limited attentional resources available for comprehension of the text. (Douglas 2024) The process of reading fluently should become automatic before readers can devote their attention to higher level processes, such as comprehension. Reading fluency associated with efficient word decoding frees cognitive capacity for higher level processes such as comprehension. (Fuchs 2001)

### **Dyslexic vs Neurotypical brain**

There is no cure for dyslexia or any other learning disability and it remains throughout the child's life. We just teach the child to work with it. Though remediation can improve many aspects and help the child overcome their challenges, one should remember that the child still possesses the same dyslexic brain with its own limitations. Any amount of remediation is not going to make this dyslexic brain into a neurotypical brain.

There have been brain imaging studies of the neurotypical and dyslexic brains to understand the difference. MRI and EEG have shown that before remediation, the dyslexic brain showed no activation in certain regions, during reading activity. After remediation, dyslexic brains show different patterns of activation while reading, compared with non-dyslexic brains. (Richlan 2020)

The use of an evidence-based phonologic reading intervention facilitates the development of those fast-paced neural systems that underlie skilled reading. (Shaywitz 2002) But the brain of a person with dyslexia has a different distribution of metabolic activation than the brain of a person without reading problems when accomplishing the same language task. Many people with dyslexia often show greater activation in the lower frontal areas of the brain. This leads to the conclusion that neural systems in frontal regions may compensate for the differences in the posterior area. (Shaywitz 2003)

So, it is clear that even when a dyslexic brain is trained to read, it is not exactly the same process that is undergone by a neurotypical brain.

We can expect a child to improve gradually with remediation, in terms of reading and writing skills, which will get reflected in exam and they will be able to score better marks. However, the effort required for a dyslexic child to achieve 50% is significantly greater than that required by a neurotypical child to reach the same score.

Simos (2002) commented that even with intensive remediation, children with dyslexia are slow to achieve the reading fluency shown by non-dyslexic children. With adequately intensive instruction, even as children with dyslexia develop into accurate readers, their reading in grade-level text is often still slow and laboured without any fluency. (Torgesen 2001) Children with reading problems show a continuing, persistent deficit in their reading rather than just developing later than average children (Francis 1996)

Even with the best efforts from the tutor and child, there is a chance that the child is unable to improve beyond a certain level. Parents, like in this case, keep trying to get a dyslexic student to the academic level of their peers. But they forget the fact that those peers are still progressing forward, most likely at a faster rate than that of a dyslexic child. While the dyslexic child's efforts are focused on catching up, their peers are improving their existing levels.

In cases where the child has no real difficulties, the child can be motivated to put in some more effort and score more marks. But in the case of the dyslexic child, the efforts are already high. *'Don't be lazy. Work hard. Nothing is impossible.'* Statements like this would encourage a child who doesn't have any real difficulties, motivating them to put in more effort and score more marks. But to a dyslexic child, it will make them feel pressured and unvalued for their efforts. Words and actions, especially from parents, have great impact on the confidence of children. It is important to appreciate children for jobs well done and for effort. (Berne 1981)

### **Raising benchmarks**

The parents of this child had a 'never enough' attitude and kept on raising the benchmark. The child was kept under a constant guilt of underperforming and not trying hard. Whereas, truly the child had put in so much effort and had made a tremendous improvement in terms of reading, spelling and exam scores. The child felt unappreciated for his efforts. It would also demotivate the child to put in effort in the future, as there is a risk of that too being considered as insufficient.

When parents keep setting higher and higher expectations, the child can perceive that they are never satisfied. Just when a child achieves something and thinks that they will be happy and can relax, parents announce a higher expectation. When a parent doesn't acknowledge that the child has met their expectations, the child will easily assume that they are not satisfied. If this pattern keeps repeating, the child would conclude that he/she might never please her parents. This is dangerous, as they may stop trying and may no longer care what parents expect.

If the goals are too low, children may not achieve what they are capable of. If they are too high, children may get frustrated and give up. Setting appropriate and fair expectations is important. And to do so, the parent must understand the strengths and weaknesses of the child. (Savage 2014)

## **Case 5**

*Raja was an eleventh grader who struggled till Grade 7 in an English medium school. He found it difficult to score pass marks in all subjects except Tamil, his mother tongue. Tuitions and extra classes were of no use. Parents decided that he would at least score pass marks if all the subjects were learnt in Tamil and shifted him to a Tamil medium school. All other subjects except English was taught in Tamil. Though he made spelling mistakes in Tamil, he was able to read and write it. He found it easy to understand the concepts and passed his Grade 10 board exams. While continuing to study in the Tamil medium in Grade 11, his dyslexia was identified and remediation was initiated for the English language.*

### **Common sense helps**

In this case, the child was not identified as dyslexic till Grade 11. Parents were not well educated or aware of dyslexia. They just believed that the child hadn't made enough efforts and at some point, concluded that his academic abilities are low. From their limited knowledge and awareness, they found the best option that was available to them, which was to shift him to a Tamil medium school. This choice shows a thought process from the parents' side about the academic prospects of the child.

Raja's Tamil fluency was much better than his English. And being the mother tongue, understanding concepts was easier. Though the child might have suffered the embarrassment of moving from an English medium to a Tamil

medium school, it is much better than having failed at Grade 10 or dropping out of school in the intermediate levels.

### **Mother Tongue based education**

Dyslexia manifests itself in different forms based on the language. Tamil is a more transparent language when compared to English. It's easier to read Tamil than to write it without spelling mistakes. These spelling mistakes are more common in the Tamil language, even among non-dyslexic children. Knowing all the alphabet is the toughest part of Tamil. Reading is easy, as the letter sounds and letter names are the same. Whereas in English, just knowing the alphabet is nowhere near reading, as it involves more complicated phonics.

Also, learning the concepts becomes easier when it is learnt in one's mother tongue. It is the language we have been exposed right from the beginning and basic vocabulary, grammar and sentence structure are just learnt through practice even before any formal teaching begins.

The exact order of listening, speaking, reading and writing skills (LSRW) happens in sequence in the mother tongue. The child listens to other elders, then starts speaking the language, goes to school and gets exposed to the print form of language and learns to read and write it.

A seamless transition happens from speaking to writing and from vocabulary to subject comprehension. Education in the mother tongue fosters a natural progression from basic understanding to complex thought.

Though there are challenges in using regional languages in higher education, like engineering, the National Statistical Organisation's (NSO) report shows that more than 50 % of students complete secondary education in one of India's regional languages. While students from regions speaking languages like Malayalam, Telugu and Punjabi often choose English by class X, there remains a strong foundation in vernacular education, especially at the primary level.

According to a study by the Indian Statistical Institute, students taught in their native language showed significant improvements in their academic performance. This is because learning in their mother tongue reduces cognitive overload, allowing students to focus on understanding complex concepts. Education in the mother tongue, especially in primary school, helps to avoid knowledge gaps and increase the speed of learning and comprehension. The familiarity of the language helps them grasp new concepts more quickly, allowing for greater educational success.

English most often begins only when the child starts schooling. The language is not listened to or spoken at home. But when the child starts schooling, he/she is exposed to print form and asked to read and write simultaneously. This mis-sequencing of the LSRW skills itself is a difficulty in a country like India, where the mother tongue is some language other than English. When added to the dyslexic difficulties, it tends to blow out of proportion for a few children.

In such circumstances, decisions like in this case to continue with a Tamil medium school is beneficial. Once the child completes schooling, college options are available through the Tamil medium. Also, there is a chance of improving his English language skills through remediation and moving on to an English medium for college education. Either way, it had been ensured that the child's dyslexia had not stopped him from completing his school and college education. It had prevented his self-esteem from drooping to the level of being a school dropout.

This is a clear example that even without knowing the scientific reasoning behind the difficulties, a parent can make sensible decisions just by weighing in the various options available and known to them. Their decision made the child continue his schooling and move on to higher grades and college education.

Government provides open schooling like NIOS (National Institute of Open Schooling) and open colleges like TNOU (Tamil Nadu Open University) and IGNOU (Indira Gandhi National Open University). Such alternatives provide more flexibility and choices in subjects, making it suitable for struggling learners. Parents must be ready to explore these options and choose whichever best suits their child.

But, the question arises, 'Is education through the Tamil medium suitable for all dyslexics?' The answer is NO. Various aspects of the language and the strengths and challenges of the child is to be considered.

## **Dyslexia across languages**

Depending on the language, dyslexia will manifest itself in different ways. (Kamala 2015) The degree of opacity or transparency of orthographies is an important factor influencing the different writing systems of the world. English is often identified as one of the most difficult languages for dyslexic learners, due to its complex syllabic structure. (Helland 2004)

Transparent languages with consistent and predictable spelling have been considered easier for dyslexics. Comparison of transparent and opaque writing systems helps to better understand dyslexic students' needs and difficulties. It could be stated that students have problems with English because of its opacity and with its many different consonant clusters and vowel combinations. (Maria Vilanova 2025)

If grapheme–phoneme relations are consistent, children can easily acquire the grapheme–phoneme correspondence rules. With appropriate instruction, they learn to map print onto speech and accordingly show little or no delay in reading acquisition. (Landerl 1997)

Tamil is a consistent and predictable language. Though the transparency of the language is supportive to a dyslexic learner, other aspects such as high demand on visual and muscle memory, diglossia effect, homophones etc, serve as a hindrance to master the language. It is important to consider the individual learner aspects and analyse the suitability of a language rather than generalizing that a transparent language would be easier. (Nidya 2025)

## **Case 6**

*Senthil had studied in a CBSE school from kindergarten. The boy's parents were uneducated and he came from a lower-middle-class family. His marks had been good until about Grade 2 and then they started to decline gradually. Teachers at school had complained about his naughty and careless behaviour, while also attributing his poor marks to the same.*

*At the beginning of Grade 8, the school put him in a separate SEN (Special Educational Needs) class with a few other children who had been scoring less marks. The class was given a reduced syllabus covering only the most important topics and constant repetition was given. The exam question papers were only based on the contents taught to them.*

*Few students managed to pass those tests and were sent to regular class in Grade 9. Two children did not improve even after a year in SEN class and they were asked to leave the school. Senthil was one among them. Based on the school's suggestion that Senthil is unfit for the CBSE curriculum, his parents shifted him to a school that followed the state board matriculation curriculum, under the general assumption that it would be easier than CBSE.*

*The parents, who had been hoping that their only child would get educated and lead a better life, were extremely disappointed. They were angry at Senthil for not putting in enough effort and not making any progress, even after the school's tremendous effort in the SEN class. He was harshly scolded by his parents. He was ashamed of himself and guilty at the same time, to the extent that he*

*wanted to end his life. Later, he was enrolled in a new school following a state board matriculation curriculum to continue with Grade 9. After a few months in Grade 9, he was brought in for an assessment and found to be dyslexic.*

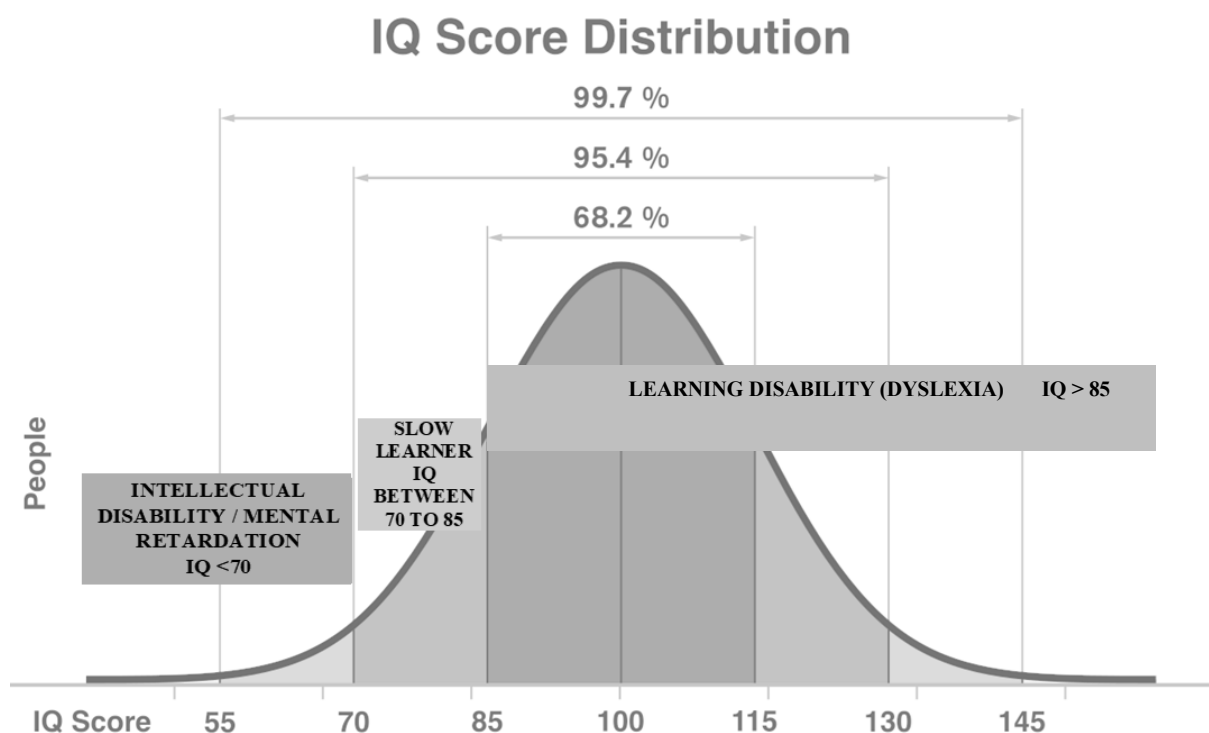
This case is a clear failure of the school, teachers and their methodologies. The child had been there since kindergarten and not even a single teacher had doubted his dyslexia. Even if they were not skilled enough to diagnose dyslexia, they could have at least referred for an assessment. It shows a complete lack of awareness among teachers and an irresponsible attitude of the school. The school had a SEN class without the required knowledge or skills required to support such learners.

SEN is not just about reducing the portions. Eventually, the child has to learn the entire syllabus for Grade 10. So, reducing the portions in Grade 8 wouldn't be of any use. The emphasis should have been on remediation and foundational skills. Also, the method of reducing content and increasing repetition would have helped a slow learner, but not a dyslexic child. This method, though useless, have worked out for some kids. But it didn't, for Senthil, for he was one among the two children who didn't show any progress. The reason why it worked out for some kids and not for Senthil is because their challenges were different.

Special needs and special education are common terms. But there are differences among children with special needs. The most common confusion is between a slow learner and a dyslexic child.

## Slow learner ≠ Dyslexic

The IQ level of the slow learner is 70-85, a little below average but not low enough to be classified as intellectual disability (formerly known as mental retardation). IQ level of a dyslexic child is above average, that is more than 85. It is very important for parents and teachers to differentiate between a slow learner and a child with learning disabilities like dyslexia.



Though there is a general concern about the ill effects of labelling, there is a justification to label a child with a specific tag. Both conditions are clinically very different from each other and the children suffering from these two difficulties require a different kind of attention. As the learning needs of these two groups are quite different, it is important to make a correct identification for programming needs.

## **Slow learner**

In most schools, any child who scores fewer marks is generally termed a slow learner, which is incorrect. Low marks can be due to various reasons. One of the reasons is below average IQ (between 70 and 85); in such cases, the child may be considered a slow learner. This categorization should be based on IQ level, not marks. Thus, a slow learner is a child with below-average intelligence. The thinking skills of a slow learner develop at a significantly slower rate compared to other children of the same age. The child will go through the same developmental stages as other children, but at a slower rate.

This category falls above the IQ range of intellectual disability (formerly known as mental retardation), but below the average level and can be called borderline intellectual functioning in clinical terms. (Torres 2017) They most often have learning problems at school. They lag in developmental readiness to grasp the concepts that are within easy reach of the majority of their age mates. So, they may be called rather slow developers than slow learners. (Chauhan 2011) As an adult, a slow learner usually becomes self-supporting, independent and socially adjusted. These slow learners are markedly different from under achievers and learning disabled. (Kirk 1962)

## **Dyslexic**

A child with a specific learning disability like dyslexia is one with average or above average intelligence, who has specific difficulties which can make learning very difficult. There is a discrepancy between the child's potential and

actual achievement. As per the Practice Guidelines for the Assessment and Intervention of Specific Learning Disabilities (Revised 2020), the IQ level should be more than 85 for a child to get tested for a learning disability.

The slow learners with a below-average IQ, but not low enough to be classified as intellectual disability, can go up to schooling and even simple graduate courses, depending on various other factors like remediation and support provided. The category with learning disability has an average or above average IQ and can achieve anything that a neurotypical person would achieve or even more when provided with the right interventions and choices.

The most important aspect of learning disability is that the child shows difficulties in some aspects, like reading or writing, in spite of above-average intelligence. But the difficulties of a slow learner can be attributed to low IQ, thereby ruling out even the need to get tested for a learning disability. (Nidya 2024)

### **Right label for right support**

Taylor noted that being labelled as having a general need negatively affected children's self-esteem, because, unlike the label dyslexia, this label offers very little in the way of an explanation for the child's academic difficulties. Targeted interventions are not available for those with a less specific label. Riddick (2000) also found that the dyslexia label was preferred by children over a general 'special educational needs' label. Solvang (2007) also found that, after discovering they had the label 'dyslexia', many students were relieved that

their difficulties were not their fault, while also removing the status of lacking motivation.

A slow learner may benefit from reducing the quantity of work and more repetition. But for a dyslexic child, the challenges are different. They are capable enough to study the regular content, provided it is made accessible using different, individualized teaching techniques and support, followed on with repetition for reinforcing it.

So, in this case, the actual required support for a dyslexic child, like Senthil, was not given in the SEN class. Even the categorisation among those children was not done in the right manner. They were all singly grouped as SEN learners, whereas they belonged to distinct categories and required different types of teaching and support. Progress could not have happened at all. But the child was blamed for not making efforts and was labelled in a worse way – ‘Helpless even after SEN classes and no scope for improvement’. Not only the parents, but the child lost hope in himself.

The other symptoms of dyslexia, such as difficulties in copying from the board, were considered as being playful or inattentive. The extra time that the child took while he was struggling to process information was considered as disobedience or daydreaming.

### **Teachers and School**

The lack of awareness among teachers and the school had caused so much

trauma to the child in this case. There might be many such children screaming for help, hence raising a serious need for more awareness at the school level.

Surveys have shown that teachers did not know what dyslexia was or had misconceptions. (Aladwani 2018) Many teachers feel they lack the knowledge and competency to teach within the inclusive school parameters and consider it the role of other professionals to attend to students with diverse learning needs. (Forlin 2004) The majority of teachers advocated training programs on dyslexia and expressed willingness to attend such programs. (Shetty 2014) The professional development that teachers did get, if they received any at all, seemed cursory, such as a short workshop, a booklet, a script to follow, not enough for them to give meaningful support to their students. (Dymock 2023)

Many schools did not screen for dyslexia or have a dyslexia policy or share information with parents. Taken together, these findings at the teacher and school level have important practical implications. Teacher training is necessary for improving outcomes for students with dyslexia.

## **Case 7**

*Nandha was in Grade 2. His school reports were always good and was rated 'excellent' in reading. The parent noticed that the child who reads the entire set of story books from school, never read any other book or any general words seen on boards in public places and brought him for assessment.*

*Assessment revealed that the parents' concern was right. The child was not able to read at his grade level, even with simple sight words. To clarify how he read the storybooks from school, he was asked to read those books, after the formal diagnostic assessment.*

*The results were surprising. The school had a fixed set of story books for their reading classes. With constant oral repetition of the story, the children have learnt to recite the entire story without even looking at the book. So, when they had the book and recited the story, it looked as if the child was reading fluently. When the same story words were presented to him in isolation or shown in another book, the child was unable to recognise any of them.*

*After starting remediation classes for Nandha, his mother wanted to verify if that was the case with other children too. She asked another child's parent to check the same. The other parent too reported that the child recited the story but was not able to identify the story words when shown.*

*But the other parent was convinced that the school reports were good and decided not to bother about the child's reading when there was no concern raised from the school.*

## **Reading vs Reciting**

Reading involves looking at the words, interpreting the written symbols, reading it at sight or phonetically, silent or aloud, while also comprehending the meaning of what was read. Reciting is only a recall from memory, repeating something previously learned or memorised, without needing the text. It doesn't involve word identification or reading or comprehending.

## **False self-esteem**

Nandha's parent was quick enough to spot out that the child is not fluent with the words, in terms of reading and took necessary action. The other parent, even after becoming aware that her child is not reading, didn't bother to take any action. It would have been appropriate to equip the child with necessary skills. Parent was convinced with good grades on school report cards, regardless of the actual skill of the child.

Empty, self-building words to inflate a child's ego can be counterproductive and actually make children perform worse. (Shokrایی 2000) Both educators and parents in the system are playing a role in creating false self-efficacy for the learner. We are then surprised when children do not perform well later, despite having been checked off. Frequently, they themselves are truly unaware that they are performing poorly. (Kardong 2013)

Stronger effects of self-beliefs specific to the academic domain are evident when measures of self-beliefs and achievement are matched by domain. But students who have positive beliefs about themselves, that lack a substantial

basis in actual skills or prior accomplishments, create a false foundation for approaching learning situations in school. (Valentine 2004)

Mismatch between perceived and actual performance can occur due to the various reasons. Above-average effect is the tendency of the average person to believe he or she is above average. The illusion of knowing is a cognitive bias where people mistakenly believe they understand a topic more deeply than they actually do, often feeling confident despite superficial knowledge, leading to overestimation of their competence. This happens because we confuse familiarity with understanding, especially with easily accessible information, making us 'confidently incorrect' and hindering true learning.

Studies show that higher-achieving students tend to be underconfident on difficult tasks. Lower-achieving students tend to be overconfident because of the lack of awareness about the difficulty level of the task. (the unskilled but unaware effect) (Hacker 2008) Overconfidence is maintained through preferential attention to ease over difficulty and avoiding negative information. Growth mindsets lead to openness to difficulty and in turn, greater self-insight. (Ehrlinger 2016)

If children overestimate their level of understanding, they will not take any additional effort to improve and will incorrectly assume that an adequate level is obtained. No further learning happens. (Karen 2010)

**Marks ≠ Skills** Exams in our education system are most often content-based and not skill-based. In most Indian schools and colleges, student performance

is measured by how well they can reproduce textbook knowledge in a written exam. This system rewards rote memorisation over conceptual understanding, speed over depth and short-term cramming over long-term learning. The pressure to score high often curtails creativity. Students are discouraged from questioning, debating or exploring alternative solutions. In a marks-centric system, there is little room for curiosity or divergent thinking.

A 2023 report by the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) found that nearly 50 percent of Indian graduates are not employable in industry due to a lack of skills. Despite high academic scores, many students fail to meet basic requirements in communication, problem-solving or digital literacy. In India, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has acknowledged the need to transition towards holistic, skills-based education.

High marks may just be an indication of good memory or extra effort. Without the basic skills intact, it may not be maintained as the child progresses to higher classes. Sooner or later, the child himself would realize the lack of basic skills. Knowing that real ability is less than the perceived ability will cause a shocking impact on the self-esteem of the child. It is important to ensure the mastery of basic skills like reading, irrespective of the child's report card.

## **Case 8**

*Harini had severe reading difficulties when she was in Grade 4. She was assessed, diagnosed as dyslexic and was sent for remediation. Parents thought that her brother Guhan, who was three years younger to her and was in Grade 1, may also face similar difficulties and was also sent along with her to reading classes. Both of them improved from their initial levels, with Guhan improving at a faster pace. Parents felt that Guhan is smarter than Harini and kept comparing her with her brother.*

### **Every child is unique**

Every dyslexic child is even more unique. Their strengths and challenges vary. The intensity may vary from mild to moderate to severe. There may be weakness in various aspects like phonological manipulation, rapid naming, working memory etc. There may be double deficits or any co-occurring conditions like ADHD. Also, the stage at which it has been identified and initiated with remediation plays an important role. All these factors decide the time taken for remediation, the pace of remediation and the scope for improvement.

Dyslexia can exist in various forms, with each one posing different challenges. It's common for a child to show a mixed profile, meaning they have traits from different forms of dyslexia, in varying proportions and intensities.

**Phonological Dyslexia** - Phonological dyslexia makes it difficult for a child to separate words into their individual sounds. This makes it difficult to

recognize letter-sound relationships, which impacts spelling, pronunciation and decoding of unfamiliar words.

**Rapid Naming Dyslexia** - Children with rapid naming dyslexia experience delays in recalling and naming letters, numbers, colours or objects. Although they can recognize these elements, their response time is slower, affecting reading fluency and comprehension.

**Double Deficit Dyslexia** - This type of dyslexia combines both phonological difficulties and rapid naming challenges, making it one of the more severe forms. Children with double-deficit dyslexia struggle with both decoding words and retrieving them quickly, leading to significant delays in reading development.

**Surface Dyslexia** - Surface dyslexia affects word recognition by sight. Children with this condition rely on sounding out words instead of recognizing them instantly, making it particularly challenging to read irregularly spelled words.

**Visual Dyslexia** - Visual dyslexia is linked to difficulties in processing and interpreting visual information. Children with this condition may perceive letters or words as distorted, making reading a challenging and tiring activity.

Roughly 60% of those with dyslexia have at least one other diagnosis. (Darweesh 2020) The most common co-morbidities include ADHD, dysgraphia and dyscalculia. Dyslexia and Attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) are highly comorbid neurodevelopmental disorders. There is a strong genetic

and cognitive overlap between the disorders; around 33% of those with one condition also have the other (McGrath 2019). Studies have shown significant co-morbidities of dyslexia with other forms of learning disabilities, such as 30% for dyslexia and dysgraphia, 26% for dyslexia and dyscalculia and 36% for dysgraphia and dyscalculia. (Ashraf 2020)

In this case, Guhan and Harini had different dyslexic profiles, with varying strengths and challenges. Also, Guhan was in Grade 1 and had early access to remediation, with a very small learning gap, whereas Harini, who was in Grade 4, had a wider learning gap and hence a longer time needed for remediation. Actually, it was the parent who had been smarter in the case of second child. Most parents improve their parenting with their second or third child, drawing on the experience gained from their first.

Comparing a dyslexic child with his/her siblings, whether the sibling is dyslexic or not, would not benefit the child in any way. It would only lower her self-esteem while also triggering jealousy and enmity towards the sibling. The dyslexic child might feel ignored and unloved. Instead, parents can appreciate the strengths of each child and work on ways to improve their individual weaker areas.

The fact that each dyslexic child is unique is to be imbibed by parents, teachers and special educators. It's important to understand the unique learning landscape of the child. This helps to shape support that's personalized to their specific mix of needs.

Phonics-based reading instruction is the most common and most effective intervention for dyslexic children. (Galuschka 2014) Understanding the variations allows educators and parents to develop effective strategies, along with phonics, tailored to a child's specific needs. Methods and techniques that worked for a dyslexic child may not give fruitful results to another dyslexic child. They must be prepared to adapt their teaching to suit each child rather than comparing among students.

## **Case 9**

*Shwetha was in Grade 5 when her parents came to know that she was dyslexic. She had below average reading and writing skills and attended remediation classes. She was excellent in drawing, painting and pencil shading.*

*In her art class, the children were shown some pictures of people depicting various professions. Each one of them could choose what they would like to be in future and can draw the corresponding picture. She chose the artist profession and as usual, drew a beautiful picture. Later at home, when she showed the drawing to her parents, their response was, 'Why did you choose the artist? What will you do as an artist? We want you to become a doctor.' The child regretted that her choice was bluntly rejected and the fact that even her drawing was not appreciated.*

## **Multiple Intelligences**

According to Howard Gardner's hypothesis of multiple intelligences, which was established in the late 1970s and early 1980s, people have eight or more substantially independent intelligences.

Linguistic intelligence, logical-mathematical intelligence, visual-spatial intelligence, musical intelligence, bodily-kinesthetic intelligence, naturalistic intelligence, interpersonal (social) intelligence and intrapersonal (self) intelligence are among the eight identified intelligences. Existential and pedagogic intelligence have been added later. In schools, only two intelligences, linguistic (language) and logical (mathematical), have been

majorly recognised and assessed. Language-logic combination can be considered as academic or scholarly intelligence. (Davis 2011)

Each individual has all of the multiple intelligences, but in varying levels. It can be developed to a higher level through training and self-ability. Each of the multiple intelligences interacts with each other simultaneously. There is a significant relationship between multiple intelligences and career interest. (Azmir 2020)

Our academic system focuses on linguistic and logical intelligence. A child's talent in any other areas of intelligence will not be reflected in academics. But it is important to encourage the child in pursuing her talent. Dyslexic children usually have a unique ability in one or two intelligences. They must be encouraged to tap into their dominant intelligence, which are areas they will be exceptionally good at. (Govindaraju 2019) Possessing and progressing with extracurricular talents gives them confidence and tends to compensate for academic struggles and poor grades. It may also provide a good future career option.

In this case, the child was really good at drawing. She was scolded for low academic performance but not appreciated for her other talents. The parents have wasted an opportunity to enhance the self-esteem of the child. Such statements not only show that art is not a future choice for her, but that it is not valued as a talent in the present too. It is considered a useless talent. The child might have felt happy if she had been appreciated for her artistic talent.

## **Career choices**

Parents want their child to get into a profession which they believe holds a high status in society and would fetch more earnings. But studies show that there is no correlation between societal perceptions of intelligence, respect in society and earning. It means that being intelligent doesn't ensure more respect or earnings and vice versa. (Nidya 2023)

They must understand that the child's career choices should be made considering the child's interest and talents, not just based on parental choices, their unfulfilled dreams or societal expectations.

Studies show that career selection is based on the expression of individual personality as well as the suitability of the work environment. Interest is a reflection of one's personality. Individuals of the same type of work have common traits of personality. The harmony between personality and environment will improve work performance, stability and job satisfaction. Job satisfaction is achieved when individuals choose a career in line with their personality. (Holland 1973)

People who chose their job or business based on their interest or passion are more satisfied with their profession and like to continue doing the same than those who have chosen their jobs based on good income or personal convenience. (Nidya 2023)

Also, at fifth grade, the future career isn't going to be finalised. The child can keep improving her academic skills and also keep pursuing her other talents

like drawing. The career choice can be made later based on the child's skills, interests and opportunities available.

The Theory of Multiple Intelligences reminds us that intelligence is diverse and that dyslexia doesn't define a child's potential. The child may face challenges with reading or spelling, but they also bring unique strengths and talents that deserve just as much attention. Understanding and celebrating the child's strengths helps them feel capable, valued and supported.

## **Case 10**

*Shiva was a Grade 6 dyslexic child. His mother was also dyslexic, which made her more empathetic and understanding of his struggles. He was taught phonics and received early support from kindergarten, well before his dyslexia was identified through a diagnostic assessment. The assessment revealed that he had a high IQ level and was above his grade level in reading and writing. But the child had other dyslexic difficulties like poor working memory, untidy handwriting and longer processing speed, which posed difficulties in academic activities. He often ended up getting less marks than he actually deserved and was looked at by teachers and classmates as an average, clumsy student, leading to poor self-esteem.*

*Shiva scored average marks but had a very good skill in story writing. The skill was identified and encouraged by his parents to write more books, leading to him becoming a published author at a very young age. He received appreciation and his confidence improved.*

*Some of his classmates asked him, 'You are not brilliant in academics. Then how do you write stories? You must be using AI tools to write your stories or someone must be helping you.' He refused, but no one believed and made fun of him. The child initially got upset that some of his peers don't even accept his real talent. But he quickly came up with a reason that his classmates are jealous of his achievements and hence trying to demean the same. Convinced that he had found the real reason, he learned to ignore them and went on with more story writing and publishing while also maintaining his average exam scores.*

The classmates are children and can't be expected to understand Shiva's difficulties, nor the fact that someone can be average in academics while still possessing an extraordinary talent in other areas. But, this lack of awareness may hurt the child's self-esteem. Rather than getting appreciated for his talent, the child gets doubted if he really possesses that talent.

In this case, though the reading and writing levels were above grade levels, the child still suffered due to other dyslexic difficulties. But when the child started achieving in other non-academic areas, the perception of others changed too. In a way, it compensates for the lack of excellence in academics. One cannot simply disregard a child when the child has proved his talent in a different aspect. He cannot be considered as a dull student anymore. People may start realizing that marks don't decide everything and a person with weakness in one aspect can have a strength in other aspects. It will not only improve the child's self-esteem, but also help to change the perception of the viewers.

### **Self-esteem as a shield**

When other children made fun of his achievements, the child did not get discouraged. Rather, he reasoned it out, ignored it and focussed on further progress. The negative comments that were intended to actually hurt the child emotionally didn't produce the intended impact. It shows that not only has the child's self-esteem improved, but it has also started acting as a shield protecting the child from any negative feelings, failures or disappointments. Through such experiences, gradually, the child will also learn to motivate himself toward high performance without remarks from others.

Situations in which children are doing good jobs or displaying talents help to redirect children's negative beliefs about themselves and teach them to think in positive ways. Self-esteem is enhanced in children when they know that they have sufficient capacity to accomplish a task. (Berne 1981) It buffers the negative effect of stressful life events in adolescence and protects against depression and anxiety. (Gurung 2019)

When self-esteem is high and anxiety is thereby controlled; people are more able to experience positive affect and feel psychologically well and consequently are better able to act effectively in most life domains and cope with stresses and challenges that arise.

## Within the dyslexic children and their parents

### **From a dyslexic child**

*'I'm happy when my parents appreciate me'*

*'My parents don't love me anymore'*

*'I feel more ashamed when my teacher scolds me in front of my classmates than when my parents scold me at home'*

*'I was so lucky today. Our English period just got over when it was time for my reading turn'*

*'I'm studying for the whole day, even during holidays. When other classmates enjoy during games period and breaks, I'm stuck with my incomplete classwork'*

*'I'm so scared about the PTM (Parent-Teacher meeting) next week'*

*'My classmates have better brains than me'*

*'I can draw better than my classmates. But I'm struggling with things which my classmates are doing with ease. I don't understand the reason'*

*'I'm just waiting to finish schooling. Heard that college will be easier, but only if I pass Grade 12'*

*'I wish to go back to my younger age. No one scolded me'*

*'I wish I had attended a remedial class from KG' (Kindergarten)*

*'If only I could prove to everyone that I'm talented, not stupid'*

When a dyslexic child begins school, they see themselves as typical learners. When reading and writing are introduced, they may not be able to develop as much as their peers or classmates. They see their peers understanding and learning the language. They are unable to do so, leading to an ongoing effect. (Neil 2016)

The effects become so huge that the child's dyslexia and its impact gain more importance than the child itself, to the extent that the dyslexic children feel their deficits have taken away their parents' love for them. Some wanted to go back to their earlier childhood, before school, exams and marks came into their life. Most children said their parents' appreciation made them happier. Some children had an urge to become successful and prove their worthiness to their parents.

Few said that they wanted to be appreciated at school by teachers and classmates. With further conversation, it was understood that these children already had the support and appreciation from their parents. They were not scolded much for their low marks and didn't feel unloved by their parents. When scolded, many were affected more by the teachers' scolding in front of the class than by parent's scolding.

Children felt that they were studying for the whole day. The everyday routine was to attend school from morning till evening, attend remedial class to bridge the learning gaps, to attend tuition for homework completion, with little or no time left for any other activities. Even enjoyable periods, such as games, are spent on completing the unfinished classwork. Dyslexic children often have

difficulties in taking notes or copying from the board, which can result in incomplete classwork. Teachers make them complete it by asking them to copy from other students' notes during the free time and non-academic periods. Teachers, due to a lack of awareness, are penalizing dyslexic children for their difficulties. Also, the child would not gain anything out of it.

The children compared themselves to their peers. Most often, they felt that they scored low marks in spite of tremendous efforts, whereas some of their peers were able to score very high marks easily.

Struggling with hard tasks is the same for almost everyone and hence doesn't hurt one's ego. But dyslexic children's struggles are mostly with things that are considered simple or usual by everyone, giving a big blow to their confidence. The children felt under constant pressure to finish work and that school is harder for them than everyone else.

Though they had other talents like drawing, sports, dance or music, it was not of much use in the school setting except on sports day or cultural day. Some parents have taken serious consideration about the non-academic talents and enrolled them in evening classes, attending competitions or level qualifying exams corresponding to the chosen activity. But they were unsure if there was any future for their talents. Even when non-academic success was achieved, academic struggles continued and were reminded about daily through incomplete work, low marks, etc.

## **From the parents of a dyslexic child**

*'Why me? Why my child?'*

*'Will my child be able to complete schooling?'*

*'Will he/she become a graduate?'*

*'What will everyone think about him/her?'*

*'Am I a bad parent? Is it my mistake?'*

*'Maybe, I should have taken better care and brought him/her earlier to remedial classes'*

*'Think we have chosen the wrong school or the wrong board'*

*'Both of us are well educated. Every other child in the extended family is becoming a doctor or engineer. What future does my child have? No one will even respect him/her'*

*'We are not educated and struggling so much. We don't have a backup like the rich people. Only if my child scores high marks, goes to a good college and then a good job, will the future be good. Otherwise, it will just be like our life'*

No parent is ready or prepared for a dyslexic child and hence gets an initial shock and disappointment when they come to know that their child is dyslexic. Though they start accepting and do their best for the child, they still feel that it is unfair that they have to deal with a neurodivergent child.

Along with the realisation of disability comes the need for greater involvement of parents, especially the mothers, who are heavily involved in academics and emotional support, leading to high stress. Mothers are often associated with having negative feelings such as denial, frustration, guilt and stress when an aspiration to have a 'perfect' child is unfulfilled. (Chandramuki 2012)

Some parents deal well; they completely adapt to the child, keep their expectations reasonable and keep encouraging the child's strengths while also working on the weaknesses through remediation. But some parents lack this adaptability. They keep comparing their child to a child they were expecting (an ideal topper child who studies well, behaves well and is also good in extra-curricular activities). When their disappointment is conveyed to the child, even in very subtle ways, the child understands that his/her parent is not happy with them. This could be the worst situation for a child to be in.

Most of the mothers feel caught between the child's inabilities and struggles with homework and complaints from school teachers. (Alias 2015) About 95 percent of mothers of children with dyslexia experience anxiety regarding their child's future life and their academic performance. (Karande 2009)

Parents expressed a perception of school as a mismatch for their children; that they are fish being asked to climb trees. It is true in a way that the curriculum was planned for children without such problems. In addition, they are also concerned with several issues that involve uncooperative and unconcerned teachers as well as issues in attending special classes and the education

system, which heavily stresses on academic accomplishment. (Waggoner 1990)

Parents' thought revolves around the future of the child or any possible parenting mistakes that they might have committed knowingly or unknowingly in the past. But children talk about the present situation. Unless the present is addressed, parents cannot overcome the guilt about the past or fear about the future.

Learning disabilities are highly confusing to children. For example, being unable to read usually makes them feel they are stupid, though they are very bright with above average IQ. They may not value themselves much and they may not feel lovable. For the child who suffers from such confusion, parental love and support are highly essential.

## **CHAPTER 5 - DISCUSSION**

### **5.1 Key takeaways from case studies**

1. Early identification and intervention are important. Even without a formal diagnosis of dyslexia, intervention for reading difficulties is helpful.
2. Continuous practice and staying in remediation are mandatory. There is no stop till the child meets the grade level requirements.
3. Tuition is not the same as remedial intervention. Tuition won't help dyslexic children. Only remedial intervention would be helpful.
4. Accept the strengths and weaknesses of the child. Appreciate efforts, not just the result. Don't keep raising the benchmark.
5. Don't let dyslexia stop the child from finishing school and college education. Think sensibly and explore alternatives and make the best use of them.
6. A dyslexic child has above-average intelligence (IQ) and is not a slow learner. Dyslexia awareness among school teachers is essential to cater appropriately to various categories of SEN learners. They must educate themselves first and take it to the parents at the next level.
7. The child's self-esteem must be built on his / her real abilities. If it is based on something pretentious, with no efforts taken to convert the pretentious aspect into real, it will have a shocking impact on the child when the reality is exposed.

8. Every dyslexic child is unique, each with their own strengths and challenges. Stop comparing and trying to find the smarter one. Rather, focus on becoming smart parents/teachers.

9. While it is important to improve on the child's weaker areas, it is equally important to focus on the child's strengths in other non-academic aspects, thereby allowing the child to have some feel-good aspects about themselves.

10. Developing the child's non-academic skills and talents not just improves his/her self-esteem, but it acts as a shield against disappointments and failure, making them more resilient in facing their struggles.

Through the case studies, it can be understood that various factors play a role in determining the self-esteem of dyslexic children. People who play a role are parents, teachers, peers and society. The other factors in the child's environment are identification, remedial intervention, educational attainment and co-curricular skills. The factors are all influenced by parents, as they are the ones who can take the child for assessment, arrange for remediation or give them a special focus on their other co-curricular strengths.

The teachers and school have a huge role in becoming more aware, identifying and supporting dyslexic children. Suggestions can be given by schools, but the decision to finally do it or not resides with the parent. Awareness and support from peers and society also play a role. But it is a long-term process to educate everyone and bring a change in each one of them.

Though schools have to move forward with inclusion strategies, a school will always be a common place for many children, where one cannot expect individualized teaching and learning for a dyslexic child. The child may change schools and have different teachers and classmates, but parents will stay with them forever.

A child can never be too special to anyone except parents. No school or teacher can replace a parent. An aware and supportive parent can play the child's advocate at school or in society. The term 'aware' here means two things- 'child aware' and 'dyslexia aware'. Even without being aware of dyslexia, just being 'child aware', that is, being aware of the child's difficulties and accepting the same, will push the parent to look for ways of helping the child. By being 'dyslexia aware', the parent can educate others.

Parents have to accept the fact that their children must be left to learn at their own pace because it is no good pushing them beyond their capacity. Focusing on the strengths of dyslexic children rather than their disabilities, recognizing and nurturing their innate potential can enhance the child's self-esteem and promote their maximum development. (Kumar 2009)

It is clear that, though there are many aspects and people playing a role in establishing the self-esteem of a dyslexic child, parents play the most important role. The remaining aspects are either determined, managed or influenced by parents, making them the most irreplaceable part of a child's life.

## **5.2 Moving forward**

Schooling is the most difficult part, as there are fixed expectations from children irrespective of their challenges. The goal must be to finish schooling in any board as per the child's strengths and challenges. In India, NIOS offers more flexibility than other boards like CBSE, ICSE or state boards.

College would be easier when the right choices are made. In cases where regular college would be a struggle for dyslexic children, distance learning options like TNOU or IGNOU can be considered. The child should also be encouraged to develop his or her other talents.

As they get older and move out of the education phase, assistive tools can be used to help them compensate for their weak areas. Assistive technology encompasses a range of tools from low to high tech, selected based on individual needs, tasks and context. Examples include organizational aids like highlighters and personal management software, auditory support tools such as voice synthesizers, reading tools including scanners with speech synthesis and writing assistance through spelling and grammar checkers and word processing tools. (Riviere 1996)

Many adult dyslexics felt dyslexia was a disability when they were at school, as it was an inflexible environment with no escape from reading and writing, along with unfair comparison with age-appropriate peers. There is much more flexibility as an adult to choose professions that play to a dyslexic's strengths. (Alexander 2015)

Career options may be jobs in fields where the child is good at or entrepreneurial options with their own business. Self-employment allows dyslexics the ability to work in their own way, concentrating on strengths while also delegating the tasks they are not good at. Dyslexics who have attained prestigious careers (e.g. doctors, lawyers, educators, filmmakers, computer programmers, writers, administrators) have pursued their passionate interests. (Alexander 2016)

A suggestion would be to shortlist a few options based on the child's interests and abilities. This shortlisting of career options may be done by parents and the child. If required, help can be sought from career counsellors. Decide on which subjects would be useful and focus on those, while ensuring the minimum requirements in other subjects. This backtracking would avoid overloading the child with too many requirements, which might not even have a role in the child's future. Also, when the options are clear, the marks required to enter the selected career choices can also be estimated. If the child is scoring sufficient marks, unnecessary pushing to score more marks can be avoided.

Defined learning outcomes guide students in choosing their educational paths by clarifying what skills and knowledge they should acquire during their studies, helping them to decide on majors, minors and future careers.

Better study habits and high self-esteem, together with high levels of work perseverance and resourcefulness, compensated for the negative effects. (Gerber 1996) Graduates with dyslexia perceived that they needed to work

harder and longer than their peers to be successful. It offers a reassuring picture of the college studies and career success of individuals with dyslexia. They have compensated for their disability by accessing their strengths. (Shaywitz 2020)

### **5.3 Dyslexic Adults**

While rote thinking and memorization were extremely difficult, higher level cognitive skills, such as conceptual thinking, were a strength. Adult dyslexics described classrooms as places that did not fit their way of learning. Their disability did not extend much outside the classroom, but was only visible in school. (Lambert 2019)

Studies comparing successful and unsuccessful dyslexics found that all individuals experienced school trauma. Dyslexics had similar school experiences, like late diagnosis, teachers without an awareness of dyslexic barriers to learning and humiliation from both peers and teachers due to their low academic performance. But each has taken different lessons from their experience at school. (Neil Alexander 2016)

Unsuccessful adult dyslexics were prone to doubt their own abilities, self-blaming, pessimistic and getting upset when things go wrong. 40% of unemployed adults using UK government job centers were dyslexic. Dyslexics are more likely to drop out of college and university and face social and economic disadvantage, which leads many such individuals into criminality. (Mishna 2003) People who grow up with unremediated reading difficulties are

more likely to have fewer job prospects and more psychosocial and mental health challenges. (Hudson 2007) Many leave mainstream education unable to find gainful employment and are forced to use illegal means to support themselves and their families. Dyslexia is overrepresented in prisons; 70% of inmates read at or below a fourth-grade level. (Tony 2004)

Scott found that a key distinction between successful and unsuccessful individuals with dyslexia was that the successful ones had at least one supportive person (mostly their mother) who recognized their abilities and nurtured their interests. Mothers are integral to their child's support system. They assume the roles of investigator, advocate and tutor as ways to support the academic learning, social and emotional growth of their children. (Washburn 2014) Even in informal free-play situations, most children call their mothers' attention to their achievements. (Stipek 1992)

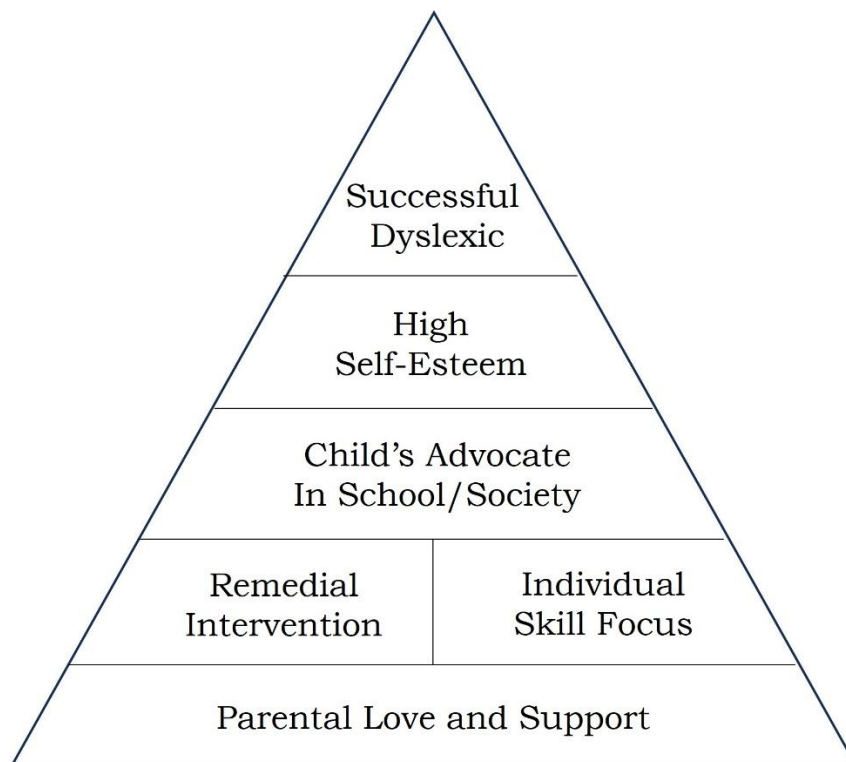
Higher parental support, sports and non-academic subject success paved the way for them to experience success as children. They had the urge to prove that they are not stupid or lazy. As adults, they were more willing to take risks, saw failure in a positive light and frequently were self-employed, allowing a focus on strengths rather than weaknesses.

Most successful adults were knowledgeable about their disability and creative in compensatory strategies, took control of their lives, were goal oriented and persistent and chose environments that suited their abilities and disabilities. (Telander 1994)

The most important factor was reframing. Reframing means reinterpreting a situation in a productive, positive way. The stages of reframing are recognizing the disability, accepting it, understanding it and its implications and taking action. Highly successful adults used reframing, moderately successful ones did not progress through all four stages to the same extent as the highly successful and the marginally adjusted group did it unsuccessfully or not at all (Gerber 1996). Success involves a continuous process of confronting one's strengths and weaknesses and making adjustments.

## CHAPTER 6 - CONCLUSION

'We are worried what the child would be in future, forgetting that he/she is someone today' - This quote is a gentle reminder to focus on today for a better tomorrow. Parental role in shaping a dyslexic child's success is depicted as hierarchical levels within the pyramid.



From the bottom of the hierarchy upwards, it starts with parental love and support as the basic needs for a dyslexic child. The child already has a lot to deal with. They may struggle with reading and writing, but they should never struggle to feel loved and accepted at home. The child should be assured of it even when nothing goes well, irrespective of success or failure in their lives. It will serve as a base for understanding the child's needs.

The child's strengths must be encouraged while weaknesses must be addressed with remedial intervention. Since it takes time and even after remediation, some struggles would continue throughout, success in other non-academic areas would compensate for the academic difficulties and provide them with the strength needed to face it. To start nurturing success in a child, the emphasis is to focus on what the child does well currently and offer additional opportunities for success in that area. (Patricia 1985) Parents should also be the child's voice in school or society, whenever needed.

When all these are ensured, the self-esteem of the child will improve, leading to the child becoming a successful adult in future. Parents often view their children as extensions of themselves, which can influence their own self-esteem. As they address their child's needs and challenges, their own self-regard may increase. When parents observe their child's journey towards self-acceptance, they also experience positive emotions.

Famous dyslexics like Albert Einstein, Pablo Picasso, Thomas Edison, Steve Jobs, Steven Spielberg, Agatha Christie etc., keep reminding us that a dyslexic child's journey may be different, but the destination can be extraordinary. Throughout this journey, parents should extend love and support and the children are sure to lead happy and successful lives.

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