UNIT 5  LEARNER IN SOCIO-CULTURAL CONTEXT

Structure

5.1  Introduction

5.2  Objectives

5.3  Socio-cultural Diversity among Learners

5.4  Factors Affecting Learners
   5.4.1  Family Structure
   5.4.2  Type of School
   5.4.3  Geographical Location
   5.4.4  Socio Economic Status
   5.4.5  Cultural Background
   5.4.6  Language

5.5  Changing Perception about Learners

5.6  Various Type of Learners
   5.6.1  Auditory Learners
   5.6.2  Visual Learners
   5.6.3  Tactile/Kinesthetic Learners

5.7  Differently-abled Learners
   5.7.1  Learners with Mental Retardation
   5.7.2  Learners with Hearing Impairment
   5.7.3  Learners with Visual Impairment
   5.7.4  Specific Learning Disabilities

5.8  Let Us Sum Up

5.9  Unit End Exercises

5.10  References and Suggested Readings

5.11  Answers to Check Your Progress

5.1  INTRODUCTION

Learner cannot be considered in isolation from their social and cultural contexts. Learning is affected by the social and cultural factors. Learning occurs in a social as well as cultural context.

A learner learns from his/her family, society and school; for e.g., a child learns from his parents’ behaviour towards him/her, his/her peer group with whom s/he plays games and his/her school where s/he participates in various curricular and co-curricular activities. We can say everything which a learner learns, takes place in a socio-cultural context.
In this unit, we shall attempt to understand learner’s characteristics (socio-cultural diversity among learners), changing perceptions about learner and various types of learners along with differently-abled learners.

5.2 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- list and clarify the various types of learners;
- explain how the socio-cultural factors affect learning;
- explain changing perceptions about learners;
- define differently-abled learners;
- identify various type of differently-abled learners by the signs and symptoms (not a disease?); and
- list and clarify various types of specific learning disabilities.

5.3 SOCIO-CULTURAL DIVERSITY AMONG LEARNERS

Socio-cultural diversity is the reality of an Indian classroom. You may find children from various cultural groups, various socioeconomic backgrounds in the same classroom. Right to Education Act, 2009 has advocated an inclusive classroom. Here inclusion means not only inclusion of children with special needs but also, children from various deprived and backward classes, children with language diversities, children from various castes, religions and various cultural groups are to be placed in the same class. Let us try to understand what is the socio-cultural diversity in classroom?

Socio-cultural diversity in this context includes race, class, ability, different learning conditions and styles, ethnicity, age, gender, sexual orientation, religion, nationality and other dimensions that make up the identity of the individual student and impact his or her learning experience. (UNESCO, 2011)

It means, being a teacher, we have to ensure that children from any background should not be deprived of learning opportunities due to the diversity in their learning styles or needs. We have to provide such a learning environment where these diversities among learners can be viewed as diverse resources of learning. According to socio-cultural theorists, learners cannot be considered in isolation from their social and cultural contexts. A great diversity is found in learner’s social conditions and cultural background and their learning occurs accordingly.

Activity 1

Observe at least one classroom each of a government secondary school and a privately managed public/convent school in your nearby area. Make a chart of diversities you have observed in the classroom keeping in view the definition given by UNESCO.

Let us examine a few factors which result in diversity among learners.
5.4 FACTORS AFFECTING LEARNERS

The diversity among learners is not only in their social conditions or cultural backgrounds but also in their learning styles, needs, aspirations and attitude. How did this diversity emerge? This question needs to be answered by the teacher; as a teacher, you should be aware of the factors which may make a difference in the learning of learners. A few are as follows:

5.4.1 Family Structure

Diversity in family structure also affects the learner’s learning. For example, the learners who belong to nuclear families may have lower learning outcomes. It is assumed that in nuclear families, increased responsibilities on learners such as childcare roles, domestic duties impede in the time available for school work and the parents also have less time to spend with their children and to supervise their school work. As a result, they may show low learning performances. Whereas in a joint family, parents spend more time with their children as they have helping hands in their family. So the learners who belong to joint family may show higher learning performances.

5.4.2 Type of School

Apart from the family structure, type of school also influences the learner’s learning outcome. A private school has a number of learners from high class families whereas a government school has a number of learners from middle and low class families. Private schools select learners with high academic abilities and they also have financial support. The learning environment in a private school is also quite different from a government school. Due to greater financial support in a private school, the classrooms and laboratory are well-furnished and well equipped with new technologies, while in government schools the classrooms are not well equipped. We read news regarding the real picture of our government schools where there are no classrooms in most of the schools and learners learn in the open. As a result of lack of appropriate learning environment, learning outcome of learners in government schools is sometimes lower than the private schools.

5.4.3 Geographical Location

Geographical location also affects the learning outcome. Due to lack of appropriate learning facilities in the rural and remote areas such as cost, transport facilities, low family income, new technologies such as computer, mobile, internet etc., the learners from these areas remain disadvantaged. We may say that learners who belong to non-metropolitan areas may have lower learning outcome in comparison to the learners from metropolitan areas.

5.4.4 Socio-economic Status

The socio-economic status of family also plays a crucial role in the learning of a learner. A learner who belongs to a family of lower socioeconomic status, does not get intellectual stimulus from his family and as a result, he remains lazy and inactive in the classroom. On the other side, the learner who belongs to a family of medium socioeconomic status, gets full motivation from his family, has high level of aspirations and as a result he remains active in classroom. We may say that his/her learning outcome is may be higher than the learner who belongs to lower socio-economic status.
5.4.5 Cultural Background

Learner’s cultural background has an impact on learning. Learners from different cultural backgrounds learn in a different manner. You must have observed in your classroom, when you ask a question, some learners of your class could be able to make eye contact with you while they were responding but there may be some other learners too, who felt shy and could not make eye contact with you while they were responding. It generally happens in our classrooms and it is just because of cultural diversity. Cultural backgrounds impact the way the learner participates in various activities of school. A learner from collectivist cultural background prefers to learn in cooperation with others, while a learner from individualist cultural background prefers to learn independently. The important aspect for the teacher is that s/he should be aware about the differences between the school environment and cultural background of a learner. The teacher must work to understand the learner’s cultural background and in this task the learner herself/himself could be a valuable source of information to the teacher. As a teacher, we may encourage the learners to talk about his/her family and cultural background etc., so that we can organise the learning environment accordingly.

5.4.6 Language

The linguistic diversity also affects a learner’s learning outcomes. Have you ever thought about the situation when you get sick and go to consult a doctor? Just try to think for a moment, if in this situation four different doctors who speak different languages, would inform you about your health status, how would you feel? The same is the case with the teachers. In our classrooms we have diverse learners including many non-Hindi or non-English speaking learners. Learners who belong to those families whose language do not match with the medium of instruction of the school find themselves disadvantaged. Linguistically diverse learners sometimes show lower learning outcome and higher dropout rates. To ensure educational equity, we may appoint qualified teachers to reach the linguistically diverse learners. As a teacher, we should start language programmes for the learners with specific languages and during parent teacher meetings, we should try to present all the information in the parent’s native language.

Check Your Progress 1

Note: a) Write your answers in the space given below:
   b) Compare your answers with those given at the end of the Unit.

1. List socio-cultural factors that may make a difference in the learning among learners?

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Learning can take place anytime, anywhere and by anyone. Learning does not require any attendance, any exam, grades or marks. In the present scenario, we are able to learn in different ways with the help of different media such as digital media (mobile devices, internet and computers etc.). In place of the term student, we should use the term learner. In our schools we should create an atmosphere where we give more importance to a learner rather than to a student. Children in our classrooms compare themselves to other children. It is a natural phenomenon that every child compares themselves with other children during the learning process. Traditionally, in schools, a teacher gives appreciation to those children who are good, meaning those who follow directions, complete their homework, get high marks and grades.

We have to change our perception about learners by finding a learner in every child and by helping them to learn best. For this purpose a teacher should have learner’s personal profile which may be helpful for a teacher to understand how each learner engage himself/herself with the content, how s/he express his/her previous knowledge and how s/he understands new knowledge.

For appreciating good learners there is a need to develop such a learning environment where every child can be recognized as a learner, a learning environment that can give direction to the learners to think in depth about their learning. On one side it may be helpful for learners in setting their learning goals to support their learning while on the other side, it may also be helpful for teachers in creating an understanding of tools, strategies and resources which will be helpful for learning of learners.

Now the question which comes in our mind is, as a teacher, what we should do to develop such an environment. As a teacher, we should talk with the learners to know how they are learning with us. This type of conversation will open a door to maximize learning. We should appreciate our learner’s interests so that they are able to think about their future.

Check Your Progress 2

Note: a) Write your answers in the space given below:
    b) Compare your answers with those given at the end of the Unit.

2. True/False
   a. Learning requires attendance, exam, grades or marks. (T/F)
   b. Our school culture does not appreciate to those children who are good learners. (T/F)

3. Why there is a need to view every child as a learner?
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5.6 VARIOUS TYPE OF LEARNERS

Every learner has a unique learning style. By understanding the learning styles of your learners, you can adopt better teaching strategies for their better learning. We can classify learning styles into three main categories:

5.6.1 Auditory Learners

Auditory learners learn listening to the verbal lectures, discussions, listening to what others say. These learners by listening to the tone of voice, pitch of voice and speed, etc., interpret the underlying meaning of speech. For auditory learners written information is useless until heard by them.

Role of Teacher

Some common strategies which a teacher may use to help these learners are:

- Traditional teaching methods, where lecture is considered as the least effective method but auditory learners learn best by listening.
- Present the information verbally by interacting with learners.
- Encourage the learners to participate in discussions.
- Recorded lectures may be used to present learning material.

5.6.2 Visual Learners

Visual learners learn through seeing the teacher’s body language and facial expressions to fully understand the content of a lesson. These learners prefer to sit in the front row of the classroom to avoid any visual obstructions. During the discussion in the classroom these learners take detailed notes to retain the information.

Role of Teacher

Visual learners learn best from visual objects. So as a teacher, in our classrooms:

- we may use concept mapping method for teaching.
- we may use charts, diagrams, pictures, videos, overhead transparencies, etc.
- we may encourage the learners to use color pens or colored highlighters when they read and take notes.

5.6.3 Tactile/Kinesthetic Learners

Tactile/ Kinesthetic learners learn through moving, doing and touching. These learners cannot sit for a long period and may be distracted by their need for activity. These learners enhance their learning potential when an opportunity is provided to them to do something by themselves. Generally, in our science classrooms it can be observed by us, where learners learn by doing.

Role of Teacher

Tactile/ Kinesthetic learners learn best when they are engaged in activities. As a teacher, in our classrooms:
We may provide opportunities to learn by doing

We may encourage them for participating in exhibitions, club activities, drama, dance, skit, and field trips, etc.

We may use problem solving method and project method as teaching methods.

Check Your Progress 3

Note:  a) Write your answers in the space given below:
      b) Compare your answers with those given at the end of the Unit.

4. Suggest two possible supporting strategies, which may be adopted by you as a teacher for:
   a. auditory learners
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      ...........................................................................................................
   b. visual learners
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      ...........................................................................................................
   c. tactile/kinesthetic learners
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5.7 DIFFERENTLY- ABLED LEARNERS

Differently-abled learners are those learners who although have average or above average intelligence, face some difficulties in learning. They may be creative but are not able to perform well (in reading, writing or in mathematics). We can say that differently-abled learners can also learn, like a normal learner by using appropriate teaching methods, e.g. a learner who is blind cannot learn by reading a normal text but s/he can learn by what s/he hears and does, a learner who is deaf cannot learn by hearing a lecture but he can learn by what he see and do.

5.7.1 Learners With Mental Retardation

Mental retardation (MR) is also called intellectual development disorder (IDD) or general learning disability. According to American Association on Mental Retardation (AAMR) 2002, “Mental Retardation is a disability characterized by significant limitation in intellectual functioning & in adaptive behavior as expressed in conceptual, social and practical adaptive skills. This disability originates before age 18”.

Learner with this disability may:

   take long time to learn language compared to a normal learner
   take long time in learning social skills
take long time to learn how to take care of their personal needs such as using bathroom, getting dressed, eating food etc.

For educational purposes we can classify learners with mental retardation into three categories:

1. **Educable**: learners who have an IQ approximately 50-70
2. **Trainable**: learners who have an IQ approximately 20-49
3. **Custodial**: learners who have an IQ below 20

All the above categories are based on the level of functioning of the learner with mental retardation. It helps us to decide which type of education or support should be provided to the learner.

**Role of Teacher**

Some common strategies which a teacher may use to help the mentally retarded learners are:

- Emphasize on demonstration rather than just giving verbal directions
- Present new information using pictures and provide the learners with hands on materials
- Break longer tasks into small steps
- Give immediate feedback to the learner
- Involve the learners in group activities or various club activities

**5.7.2 Learners With Hearing Impairment**

Hearing impairment or hearing loss is a full or partial decrease in the ability to detect and understand sounds. According to Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) 1992 “An impairment in hearing, whether permanent or fluctuating that adversely affect the child’s educational performance.”

Thus, from the above definition we may conclude that hearing impairment causes problems in communication. Hearing impaired learners need additional time for learning speech and language.

For educational purposes hearing impaired learners can be classified into four categories:

1. **Mild hearing loss** - 25-50 db
2. **Moderate hearing loss** - 51-70 db
3. **Severe hearing loss** - 71-90 db
4. **Profound hearing loss** - 91 db and above

**Role of Teacher**

Learners with mild and moderate hearing loss may be admitted into the regular schools and educated with the help and support of the teachers. Some common strategies which a teacher may use to help these learners are:

- Allow use of appropriate modern hearing aids
arrange seats in front, closer to the teacher and with other learners

provide teaching notes in advance to these learners so that they can read them before the topic is discussed in the class

Providing new information using pictures and emphasising on demonstration

5.7.3 Learners With Visual Impairment

Visual impairment is also known as vision loss or vision impairment. It is measured through the loss of any of the visual functions such as acuity, color vision or binocular vision.

According to the PWD (Persons with Disability) Act (1995) “Blindness refers to a condition where a person suffers from any of the following conditions, namely; 1. Total absence of sight, or 2. Visual acuity not exceeding 6/60 or 20/200 (Snellen) in the better eye with correcting lenses, or 3. Limitation of the field of vision subtending an angle of 20 degree or worse.”

In India, the definition of visual impairment is adopted from the Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995 and according to it, we can divide visual impaired learners into two categories:

A. **Blindness**: It refers to a condition where a person suffers from any of the following conditions:

   - total absence of sight; or
   - visual acuity not exceeding 6/60 or 20/200 (Snellen) in the better eye even with correction lenses; or
   - limitation of the field of vision subtending an angle of 20 degree or worse. The visual acuity and visual field are to be assessed for deciding the blindness.

B. **Low Vision**: The Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995 (PWD Act, 1995) has also included low vision as a separate category and defined it as follows:

   “Person with Low Vision” means a person with impairment of visual functioning even after treatment or standard refractive correction but who uses or is potentially capable of using vision for the planning or execution of a task with appropriate assistive devices

**Role of Teacher**

Some common strategies which a teacher may use to help these learners are:

- use braille for blind learners
- make changes in instructional material and classroom environment of general classroom for teaching visually impaired learners
- provide such reading materials to low vision learners which have large print size
- arrange seats in front, closer to the teacher and with other learners
- allow use of computer in classroom so that learner with low vision are able to use screen enlarger, screen reader/ speech synthesizer for learning
Understanding the Learner

- allow use of low vision aids
- use audio learning materials

5.7.4 Specific Learning Disabilities

Specific learning disability is defined as a disorder in the psychological processes involved in understanding or in using spoken or written language. Learner who is suffering from this disorder although have average or above average intelligence but have an imperfect ability to read, listen, speak, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations and concentrate. Here we will discuss about dyscalculia, dyslexia, dysgraphia and dyspraxia in detail.

Dyscalculia

Dyscalculia is a mathematical disability. In this disability, the learner has difficulty in learning or comprehending mathematics. There are many signs which would indicate that the learner may have dyscalculia. For example, learner with dyscalculia may:

- have trouble in counting
- have trouble in arranging the things in order or sequence
- shows difficulty in understanding fractions
- Does not understand how to use steps in a mathematical operation
- have trouble understanding concepts of quantity, place value, positive and negative values
- have trouble understanding the concepts of months, weeks, days, etc.
- have trouble in adding, subtracting, multiplying or dividing

Role of Teacher

Some common strategies which a teacher may use to help the learner with dyscalculia are:

- use such examples of mathematics which connect mathematics to real life, e.g. counting fruits, counting household objects, counting flowers, etc.
- play mathematics related games which may connect numbers to everyday activity and the learner could feel more comfortable with mathematics
- use problem solving method to solve a mathematics problem
- use visual aids while solving the problem

Dyslexia

Dyslexia is characterized by trouble in reading. It may also be referred to as reading disability. There are many signs which would indicate that the learner may have dyslexia. For example, learner with dyslexia may:

- have difficulty in reading words, writing words or spelling words
- have trouble in speaking, for e.g. they can read a text slowly but not quickly
have trouble in recalling familiar words
shows disparity between listening and reading comprehension of text

Role of Teacher

Some common strategies which a teacher may use to help the learner with dyslexia are:

- encourage the learner to read different books of his own choice like comics, story books, newspaper articles on sports, movies etc. and in school provide a quiet area and extra time for reading
- refer the learner to a reading specialist
- use books with large print and having big gaps between lines
- use teaching methods which promotes meaningful learning and avoid rote learning
- allow the use of computer in classroom
- allow the use of word processor and spell checker which will be helpful for these learners who have trouble with reading and spelling
- present reading material in small units

Dysgraphia

Dysgraphia is a writing disability. There are many signs which will indicate that the learner may have dysgraphia. For example, learner with dysgraphia may:

- have difficulty in writing correct spellings
- show poor spatial planning on paper (misuse of lines and margins)
- mix uppercase and lowercase letters
- have trouble to form letters (inconsistent form and size)
- have trouble to write on lines
- have difficulty in organizing ideas
- have trouble in thinking and writing at the same time

Role of Teacher

Some common strategies which a teacher may use to help the learner with dysgraphia are:

- instead of written examinations conduct oral examinations
- instead of writing lecture notes, allow use of tape recorders as an alternative
- provide preprinted notes to reduce writing work
- avoid criticizing the learner for careless work
- allow use of specially designed writing aids
- give the learner additional time to finish schoolwork or take tests
Understanding the Learner  

**Dyspraxia**

Dyspraxia is a motor coordination difficulty or motor learning difficulty. It may affect motor skills like hand movements needed to write clearly, mouth and tongue movements needed to pronounce word correctly, etc. Although it is not a learning disability, it generally exists along with dyslexia or dyscalculia. There are many other signs which may indicate that the learner may have dyspraxia. For example, learner with dyspraxia may:

- have difficulty in holding objects
- face problems regarding balance and posture
- have trouble gripping pencil or pen and due to this, take extensively long time for writing letters
- try to avoid games which require hand-eye coordination
- have trouble in following and remembering instructions

**Role of Teacher**

Some common strategies which a teacher may use to help the learner with dyspraxia are:

- Praise the learner for participating in a new task
- Reward him for even a bit of progress
- Allow the learner to use computer in classroom as typing could be easier for him than writing
- Encourage the learner for physical activity which could help him in the development of motor skills. For e.g. swimming, to play some simple games like hide and seek, puzzles etc.
- Refer the learner for occupational therapy and speech therapy.

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**Check Your Progress 4**

**Note:**

a) Write your answers in the space given below:

b) Compare your answers with those given at the end of the Unit.

5. How mentally retarded learners are classified, for educational purposes?

6. As a teacher, suggest two possible remedial strategies for a visual impaired learner

7. Fill in the blanks

   a. Motor coordination difficulty is known as………………which generally exists along with……………or………………

   b. Dyscalculia is a ………………………………disability.

   c. …………………is a writing disability.

   d. …………………is a reading disability.
5.8 LET US SUM UP

A great diversity is found in learner’s social conditions and cultural background and their learning occurs accordingly. Factors that may make a difference in the learning among learners are: family structure, type of school, geographical location, socioeconomic status, cultural background, language, etc.

In place of the term student, we should use the term learner. In schools, we should create an atmosphere that would give more importance to a learner rather than to a student. For appreciating good learners, there is a need to develop a learning environment where every child could be recognized as a learner, a learning environment that can give direction to the learners to think in depth about their learning. There is a need to identify learners on the basis of learning styles of learners and help them accordingly. The unit also suggests that as a teacher, we should be aware of various types differently-abled learners, i.e. learners who although have average or above average intelligence but have some difficulties in learning. They may also be creative but may not able to perform well (in reading, writing or in mathematics).

5.9 UNIT END EXERCISES

1. Visit a nearby government school and observe the diversities among learners. Make a table to suggest some teaching strategies for teachers to appreciate these diversities in developing a learner friendly learning environment.

2. How will you identify various types of differently-abled learners in your class? Explain. What strategies would you adopt to involve such students in your class?

5.10 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS


http://www.disabled-world.com/disability/types/hearing
5.11 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. Family Structure, Type of School, Geographical Location, Socio-economic Status, Cultural background, Language

2. a. False,  b. True

3. Because every learner has desires and natural capacity to learn but have different aspirations, need and learning styles.

4. a. 1. teacher may use traditional teaching methods, while lecture is considered as the least effective method but auditory learners learn best by listening.

   2. teacher may use recorded lectures of famous educationist of their area

   b. 1. teacher may use concept mapping method for teaching.

      2. teacher may use charts, diagrams, pictures, videos, overhead transparencies, etc.

   c. 1. Problem Solving Method,  2. Project Method

5. For educational purposes we can classify mentally retarded learners into three categories:

   1. Educable : learners who have an IQ approximately 50-70

   2. Trainable : learners who have an IQ approximately 20-49

   3. Custodial : learners who have an IQ below 20

6. 1. Teacher may use Braille for blind learners

   2. Teacher may allow use of computer in classroom so that learner with low vision could be able to use screen enlarger, screen reader/speech synthesizer for learning

7. a. Dyspraxia, Dyslexia or Dyscalculia

   b. Mathematical

   c. Dysgraphia

   d. Dyslexia