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# UNIT 1 FACTORS AFFECTING LEARNING

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## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

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Learning is the basic concern of a teacher. A question that makes every teacher think is "why the extent of learning is different for different individuals"? In this unit, we shall attempt to understand the factors affecting learning.

An understanding of the factors affecting learning, it is considered, would be unnatural in the absence of the context in which learning is or is not taking place. To avoid the artificiality in presentation, the unit is organised in the form of 'cases'. It is likely that you might have come across similar situations as presented in the cases. You would benefit by trying to relate the given situations/cases to those you might have come across.

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## 1.2 OBJECTIVES

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After going through this Unit, you would be able to:

- list and classify the factors affecting learning;
- explain how the factors such as maturation, home background, parental education and expectations, etc. affect learning; and
- given a situation, identify the factors affecting learning.

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## 1.3 AN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

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### 1.3.1 The Background

Saraswatinagar is a small city in the Jnanaganga district. This small city has witnessed a rapid growth due to the government decision to finance and set up electronic

industries in the area under the Electronic Industries Development Board. As a result, the city dwellers are a mixed population of socio-economic groups ranging from the poor daily wage earners to the well-to-do industrialists.

Janata Vidyalaya is one among the eighteen elementary schools in the city. The school has classes from Kindergarten to Standard VII. The academic staff of the school consists of the Head Master, the Assistant Head Master and a total of fourteen teachers.

It is due to the professional approach of the teachers under the dedicated leadership of the Head Master that the school has made a name in the city as 'the best school'. Instead of perusing a selective approach to admission of students, the school has been admitting students on a random basis. Thus, the student population of this school provides a true representation of the diverse socio-economic conditions prevalent in Saraswatinagar.

One day after the classes had begun, the following four teachers who were free, were present in the staff room:

- Chandrakant : Aged about 35 years is a physical education teacher. He is also teaches the regional language. He is well known for his social work related activities. He has a strange combination of humour and discipline.
- Suresh : Aged about 28, has joined the school only two years ago. As a mathematics teacher, he has always been logical in thought and work.
- Nazeer Ahmed : Aged about 30, is a localite. Befitting his job as the teacher of environmental studies, he occasionally conducts nature study camps for the benefit of the students of Janata Vidyalaya.
- Vibha : Aged about 38 years is the drawing teacher of the school, she also is a localite and is given the additional charge of organising activities of the Parent Teacher Association of the school. As a result, she is quite well versed with a large number of parents.

### 1.3.2 The Case of Mary D'Silva

Suresh, the mathematics teacher, was busy in evaluating the answer papers of a test he had conducted the previous day. Seeing that he was not participating in the discussion, Chandrakant asked him what was he busy with. Subsequently, the discussion went on something like this:

- Suresh : Good that you have asked me that question. I wanted to discuss with you people about this girl Mary (searches and takes out an answer paper).
- Chandrakant : Wait a minute. Are you talking about that student in the fourth standard? Or, the one who is in the second?
- Suresh : I am talking about Mary D'Silva, the one who is in fourth. You know that she stood first in the earlier classes. But, I am finding that she is not as careful now.
- Nazeer : What makes you say that?
- Suresh : In this last two tests she scored only 7 out of 10 and 6 out of 10 marks and now again she has made some silly mistakes. You see, (shows the script) she has written down the question itself wrongly in two problems. How can I consider a correctly solved problem for a question which I have not asked?

- Vibha : You mean to say that she has written down question wrongly but solved it correctly?
- Suresh : Yes, even though I know that she is very neat in work and is always interested in studies, I fail to understand why is she not careful in the examination.
- Chandrakant : Because it is your test! (all laugh).
- Vibha : Is it only so in her test performance, or, is it also in her class work?
- Suresh : I have observed this in her class work also?
- Chandrakant : (Laughingly). That means, her tuition master is not doing his work properly.
- Vibha : (Disapprovingly). No sir, she is guided by her parents only. You know both are well educated and are always encouraging her to do her best. In fact, I had seen her parents visit the school yesterday.
- Chandrakant : I was merely joking, madam. But, I have observed her continuously rub her eyes during games and, on some days, she even had to discontinue play due to a headache, If at this age one complains of headache then what would these children do when they are of our age with all the worries of life? (All laugh).

Just at that time, Mr. Aravindan, the language teacher, who had come to the staff room and was taking out some note books from his cupboard intervened... ..

- Aravindan : Are you all talking about Mary D'Silva?

Headmaster had just called to say that her parents had come to him yesterday and were worried about her recent performance. You all know how much care they take of her. It seems her elder brother has a chance of getting a rank in this year's tenth standard examination.

- Nazir : Yes, he is a fine student. I occasionally meet him in nature study camps. Frankly, I have learnt many things from him about insects.
- Chandrakant : That means, for the staff meeting tomorrow, this would be the main point on the agenda.

Others express their agreement with Chandrakant, and disperse as the school bell rings. An important reason for Janata Vidyalaya to be progressive is the concern shown by its staff towards improving the academic standards, and the welfare of students. One, among the steps taken in this direction is the weekly meeting on every Friday to discuss student related issues. The meeting, which is normally held in the staff room, had just begun. The Headmaster had a few announcements to make and some office circulars to bring to the notice of teachers. Afterwards, the meeting proceeded as follows:

- Headmaster : Friends, let us now come to the main point. While congratulating you all for the good work you have been doing, I wish to discuss with you certain issues that have been bothering me for the last 3-4 days. This is about the performance of three of our class IV students. Here, I would request one of you to note down the main points of the discussion.

(There was a brief consultation among teachers. Chandrakant proposed the name of Aravindan for the purpose and it was agreed upon by all).

- Headmaster : Let us consider them one by one.. I am talking about the case of Mary D'Silva first because her parents had met me recently in this

connection. They were quite disturbed by the fact that her performance has been deteriorating, especially in maths and language. Even though it is not a common practice, I showed them her answer scripts.

(At this juncture, Suresh intervenes).

Suresh : Sir, if you permit me, I have something to add. I have evaluated her third test papers also and she has scored 6 out of 10. In fact, some of us were discussing this yesterday.

Headmaster : Yes, Suresh her mother was particularly angry that Mary had wrongly written down the questions. Tell us, whether there was any one else in your class who had also committing the same mistake?

Suresh : Yes, there were 3-4 students who normally make such mistakes and I had taken care to check and correct it then and there. But, sir, I did not look into Mary's answer paper as I did not expect her to make this mistake.

Headmaster : Mrs. D'Silva had also mentioned about it. It seems there are occasions when she even has punished Mary. But, it does not seem to be working. (He looks at the language teacher of Class IV and asks) Dinesh, do you have something to say?

Dinesh : Yes, sir. As far as my class goes, she is excellent in written and spoken work but has been experiencing considerable difficulties in reading. One day I happened to ask her and she told me that her consulting doctor had advised her to use spectacles. It seems that her mother is strictly against it. She has told her that small children do not use spectacles and that she would not even know how to handle it.

Headmaster : Oh! I see, that means I may have to discuss with her parents again. (Many teachers express their surprise at this and Vibha speaks out.)

Vibha : Poor girl! She is so small! I think she is the youngest in her class.

Chandrakant : Yes, of course. She was not even five when she joined the first standard and the previous headmaster had considerable difficulty in convincing her parents that she was too young. They ultimately succeeded in getting her admitted when they could demonstrate that she could do many things which were expected of a first standard child. It seems they had trained her well.

(Some teachers agree with Chandrakant).

What do you think is the reason for Mary's deteriorating performance? Is it that she is inattentive? Is it that she is having difficulties due to poor eye-sight? Is it that she has not been getting enough attention at school and home? Or, is it that she has no requirements? Write your assessment of the case below:

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### 1.3.3 The Case of Maneesh

The meeting continued...

Headmaster : Secondly, I want to discuss the case of Maneesh. I hope you would remember that in one of our last year's meeting we had discussed about him.

- Aravindan : Oh yes, that boy who had failed in III standard and we had to request Nazeer Sir to tutor him.
- Headmaster : Yes, I am happy that whatever Nazeer had done seems to have worked. Maneesh is showing improvement now.
- Vibha : Sir, if you permit, we would like to know what did Nazeer Sir do to help Maneesh.
- Headmaster : Surely, but before that, let me brief our new teachers about Maneesh. (The Headmaster narrates about Maneesh which contained the following points).

Maneesh is the only son in a well to do family. His father is an operations manager in a leading industry and is usually on tour. His mother is a housewife who is educated upto fourth standard. Maneesh is a very active boy outside the classroom and has been found to be quite aggressive as well. He used to be a different person inside the class. Mostly, he was dumb when questions were asked of him, was continually distracting the students sitting near him by bringing his toys and play material to the class. On several occasions, the teachers had to forcibly collect the toys and his mother was also informed about it. He somehow had a natural ability for acting and he literally acted as if he had fainted when his mother beat him. An intelligence test was administered on him and he was found to be above average. However, his academic achievement would not reflect the same. In a Parent Teacher Meeting, his father had expressed that the teachers have not presented enough incentives and have not pushed his son hard enough. Whereas his mother was heard as saying that being the only son, Maneesh had enough property to sit and eat for his life.

(Having narrated, the headmaster requested Nazeer to inform the Group regarding the approach followed by him).

- Nazeer : To be frank with all of you, I did not know what to do in a situation like this as I was doing something like this for the first time. I thought of beginning with some understanding of the situation. I visited Maneesh's house a couple of times. I found that Maneesh had no friends of his age around him at home and much of his time went in playing with the toys which he had in plenty. Whatever conversation he had with his mother, it was in do's and don'ts with respect to his food and rest. To begin with, I wanted to be friendly with him and hence took him to a few of my nature study camps where I used to continuously keep him engaged in one activity or the other. I also used to praise him for the good work he was doing. In the beginning, he brought along some of his toys, but he was kept so busy that he had hardly any time to spend with them. Slowly, he started taking interest in nature and was asking several questions from me. Gradually, I withdrew myself and made him spend his time with two students of our school. That is all that I have done.
- Vibha : Sir, that is interesting. You said you had been to Maneesh's home. Did you talk to his parents?
- Nazeer : Yes, I found that Maneesh's mother was not able to take interest in his studies. May be, because she was not educated enough or may be she had too much of domestic work to attend to. I suggested her to occasionally ask Maneesh what he was doing in school. I also suggested that she could think of sending him during evenings to the nearby housing colony for play. I don't know whether she had done any of those.

Why was Maneesh not able to perform to his ability? How did Nazeer's approach help Maneesh? Do you think that it is necessary that in every such case one has to take the child for nature study? Why?

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(The meeting continued.....)

Chandrakant : Nazeer Sir, you have done a wonderful work. Many a times if a student is not studying, we start forcing him/her to study or giving him/her coaching thinking that it would help. You have shown that there are more basic things to learning the spending time on study. I congratulate You!  
(All agree and clap voluntarily).

### 1.3.4 The Case of Kamala

Headmaster : Now friends, I want to discuss about this girl Kamala. I have been discussing about her with some of you. As you know, she has been doing very poorly and has been barely passing in the tests. This time, she has failed in regional language and maths. I think it is high time we do something to help her.

Chandrakant : We have already been helping her, Sir. When we came to know that she did not have any books and note books, we collected money and supplied her with these study materials.

Headmaster : Yes, Chandrakant. Her parents have not been spending anything on her education. It seems her father was not at all interested in sending her to school. It was because of Vibha that Kamala is in school today. Isn't it Vibha?

Vibha : Yes, Sir. Kamala's father is a dailywage worker in a small industry whose work has not yet been regularized. He has a fairly large family with four girls of whom Kamala is the eldest. So, her mother works as a servant in a few households. She gets some money, food and occasionally, clothing. I met her for the first time in a friend's place when Kamala was accompanying her along with her younger sister. I found her very cute but extremely shy and silent. I asked her whether she was interested in going to school. She was quiet and then I spoke to her mother for a long time trying to convince her the importance of schooling. She got interested and it seems started nagging her husband who was not interested in sending Kamala to school. Ultimately, he agreed with some conditions of which one was that he won't spend any money on her.

Headmaster : Have you met her mother recently? Have you asked her about Kamala's studies?

Vibha : Yes, I had asked her mother about it. Basically, he feels that girls become disobedient due to education and that it is more difficult to arrange for the marriage of an educated girl. Further, as an eldest child, he expects Kamala to help her mother in daily domestic work and in caring of her sisters. Also, he is neck-deep in loans and is not interested in spending any money on things other than basic necessities.

- Headmaster : Now, the situation is that her father is not interested in continuing her education because he has come to know that Kamala has failed. Her mother has no voice on the matter and probably feels that Kamala could be of greater help at home.
- Chandrakant : Sir, the situation seems to be difficult to deal with. She has such a bad handwriting. Even a first standard child would write better. I have told her to practice writing at home. Moreover, she never completes any home assignment.
- Nazir : I think something also needs to be done to develop cleanliness in that girl.
- Aravindan : Sir, I think she is isolated in her class. Mostly she is found alone and it seems that she hardly speaks to anyone and looks as if she is afraid of doing anything.
- Vibha : Oh! I forgot to mention something. You all know how an elder child is treated in general. At home, both her father and mother, seem to insist that she should display more mature behaviour than expected of her age. Almost for every little mistake, they raise their hand. Some six months back, her father slapped her for some reason. It was so harsh that she was bleeding through her ear and it seems, was not able to hear for a few days. Even now she is not sharp in hearing.
- Suresh : I have observed something very interesting about this child. She would look continuously at me but quite often she would not be attentive to what I speak or write.

Can you identify the factors which are adversely affecting learning in the case of Kamala? Is she less intelligent? Does she lack a healthy socio-emotional climate at home? Is she not able to put in enough effort? Is there a lack of guidance and encouragement in her school work? Is she having any health problem? Is there anything wrong with her method of study?

If you were to plan a strategy to help Kamala improve her performance, what would be your approach?

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Headmaster : I think the first thing to do is to ask the school doctor to check her hearing. We must all also endeavour to get her to participate in group activities. Friends, I am thankful to all of you for showing keen interest in the children's affair. You are aware that it is this concern for our students that has made Janata Vidyalaya different from other schools. Our primary aim is to enable every learner in our school perform to the best of his/her ability. In some situations, as in the case of Kamala, we may have our own limitations in changing things to help her improve learning. But we would continue to do our best even under such circumstances. Thank you all very much.

(The meeting comes to an end).

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## 1.4 DISCUSSION

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Learning is influenced by several factors. The influence on learning could be favourable or unfavourable depending on the factors. Thus, good teaching or continuous studying without any time being spent on other activities may not ensure learning.

There seems to be a general tendency to presume that scoring well in an examination is the only indicator of learning. Learning itself could be of different kinds. You would study about the nature, types and theories of learning in the next unit.

You might have noticed several factors influencing learning in the three cases described in this unit. Some of the factors are easily identifiable as influencing learning while others may best be guessed to have an influence. Also, it is likely that some factors are not easily discernible. If we consider the problems of learning, it is rare that only a single factor is operative. Often, a learning problem is the result of a combined influence of several variables. Thereby, the remediation of the problem requires the strategy to be comprehensive in coverage of factors.

### Check Your Progress

Write your answer in the space given below.

1) Compare your answers with those given at the end of the block.

2) Identify and list the factors influencing learning in the cases presented:

a) Mary D'Silva

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b) Manesh

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a) Kamala

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## 1.5 A CLASSIFICATION OF FACTORS

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Any one of several internal, external or unknown factors can influence learning. In this section, a classification of the factors influencing learning has been made under the broad headings physiological, psychological, socio-emotional and educational factors.

### 1.5.1 Physiological Factors

Among the organic factors considered to cause learning problems are genetics, brain injury, biochemical imbalances, intake of toxic substances like lead, oxygen deprivation, infectious diseases, drug intoxication, malnutrition and congenital defects. While considering these as factors influencing learning, it may be mentioned that attempts to correlate specific physiological factors with learning problems are not successful.

Ability to see printed words is obviously a prerequisite to reading, especially when the children are taught by 'look-and-say' method. Auditory defects influence learning more seriously when the phonetic method is used. Even a small degree of farsightedness or aniseikonia (a difference in size or shape between the images formed by the two eyes) may cause discomfort and increased difficulty in reading. Such a child, if not attended to, may withdraw from the learning situation.

Another important factor that affects learning is maturation. Unless the body is physiologically mature and ready, academic learning cannot take place. To quote a simple example, a newborn can't be expected to take in the details of an object for his vision is unfocussed. Further, physiological maturation is one of the major factors affecting memory span of a human being. The ability to remember things of course a pre-requisite to any learning.

### 1.5.2 Psychological Factors

Several psychological factors such as intelligence, personality, attitude, interest, and aptitude have considerable influence on the learning of a child. Apart from these, motivation, self-concept, readiness is a necessity, often learns to read with little instruction. Whereas, seriously retarded readers tend to be aggressive or to withdraw, to feel insecure and apprehensive. A child's learning is influenced by his/her concept of himself/ herself. If he/she puts no value on himself/ herself or thinks of himself/ herself as a failure, he/she is generally not interested in learning. Ability to pay attention is also basic to learning. Children learn the habit of sustained attention by persisting at things that interest them. A child's attention cannot be demanded. It is said to be a by-product of interest and maturity.

### 1.5.3 Socio-emotional Factors

The family the child belongs to has a considerable influence on the learning. Family factors such as child-rearing practices, reward and punishment, scope for freedom and independence in activities, play and study facilities, ambitiousness of the parents, disorganization and discord among members, degree of maturity expected of the boy or the girl child, birth position such as eldest, youngest or single child have their definite influence on learning.

Regardless of basic motivation, the anxiety aroused by disturbed family background shows itself in thinking difficulties, viz, day dreaming, inattentiveness and difficulty in concentration.

Working mothers who also experience marital discord are not only physically absent from their children, they are also emotionally absent. Learner from such a home is usually found self absorbed and inattentive.

Parental ambition, especially that of the mother, of acquiring status and upward mobility brings with it's a resistance on the part of the child to learn. Children in such families if unable to cope with the pressure for excellence, may show a passive resistance and may be excessively slow about things at home.

A subtle but powerful influence on the growing child arises from his/her position among the children in the family. The parents of the first-born expect the child to act like miniature adults and hence the first-born are found to encounter a variety of

expectation and stress. Whereas, parents tend to be more relaxed in their “dos” and “don’ts” with the last-born. Factors like traumatic events at home, separation or death can also precipitate learning problems in an otherwise normal child.



A child who comes from a very poor family and never had any intellectual stimulation at home remains dull and unresponsive in the class. In some cultures, there is a strong sex role bias. Girls are directly or indirectly told that education is not meant for them. In a similar way, some caste groups in our country have hidden messages like ‘education is not meant for us’ or ‘our children cannot study’. This apathy to education may pose problems for the child in learning. The middle class depends for its survival on jobs, they value education highly, and frequently give their children a valued concept of education. The motivation to study is more for the child.

#### **1.5.4 Educational Factors**

Learning problems may occur because of inadequate or inappropriate teaching. The child may have difficulty in learning because the teacher does not provide adequate or appropriate instruction. Aspects such as repetition and their frequency, continuity and rest in learning, complexity and meaningfulness of the material being learnt also influence learning. If the teacher is a poor communicator or uses monotonous and uninteresting methods, the children are put at a disadvantage.

Overcrowding classrooms is another contributing factor. In some big cities, houses are converted into English medium schools. In small rooms, sixty to seventy children are made to sit and are unable to benefit from a highly verbal instruction. In rural areas, the problem is one of the adequate facilities such as classrooms, blackboards, and sometimes even teachers. Bilingualism and multi-lingualism is also a factor influencing learning.

### 1.5.5 Environmental Factors

The condition of the setting where the learning process takes place, can also enhance or interfere in intake of information. If the rooms are not well ventilated, the lighting poor, the space cramped, the environment excessively noisy or surroundings polluted (e.g., due to smoke from a nearby factory), then there will be interference in the child's learning, for the body will be more concerned with protecting itself than procuring more knowledge.

Apart from these general factors, there are certain other elements of the learning task that determine how soon and for how long a task is learnt. These may be termed as the **Laws of Learning**.

They are as follow:

- a) **Law of Use** – practise or use of any response strengthens it.
- b) **Law of Disuse** – any response not used for a long time is likely to be forgotten.
- c) **Law of Primacy** – all things being equal, the acts performed first or things learnt first are likely to be remembered longer.
- d) **Law of Recency** – the more recent the exercise the stronger is its memory.
- e) **Law of Readiness** – if the nerves pathway is ready for action, the response quickly follows.
- f) **Law of Effect** – A successful reaction that gives satisfaction is more likely to be learnt and repeated than that action which is painful.

Classmate Project

Noteword: Write the appropriate word from those given below.

or Complete the sentences with those given in the brackets.

2. Give a classification of the following. (Use the

Diagrams)

or Psychology.

A. True or False?

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## 1.6 LET US SUM UP

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Children learn best when they are mature enough and ready to learn; when they have no physiological or physical impairments; when they feel confident that they can learn; when what they are learning is meaningful to them and has a practical significance to them. Also essential to learning are a conducive home climate and parental care, suitable equipment, material and companions, freedom to select and use them, an appropriate and skillful guidance in learning.

The subsequent Units of this course would provide you with an understanding and insight into the factors such as learning impairment and disability, motivation and interest, attention and how to enhance learning skills.

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## 1.7 UNIT END-EXERCISES

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1. Select any two children having problems in learning from your school/ neighbourhood. Observe their 10 sessions of half hour each, i.e., 5 at home and 5 at school, and try to collect information regarding their learning difficulties from all probable sources such as parents, peers, teachers, etc. Write a report indicating the factors responsible for their lack of optimal learning. What remedial steps are required for overcoming those limitations?
2. Prepare an interview schedule to gather information from the parents about this child.