Editorial

Understanding slow learners in medical education: Challenges and solutions

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Introduction

Be it a world-famous educational institution or an unpopular institution, be it a kindergarten or a super specialty, regardless of the geographical region, race, culture, cadre, etc., there is always a better cohort and a poor cohort in terms of students' learning in a class.[1] All institutes have mixed sections of students.

There are a lot of definitions for slow learners; they differ from researcher to researcher and then from country to country. Slow learners are a condition where students who have intellectual potential are slightly below the average.[2] In medical education, slow learners differ from phase to phase and from time to time. And also depends on competency; some students excel in the psychomotor domain, some students more in the cognitive, and some students perform well in the affective domain.

This article will discuss the factors contributing to slow learners, the challenges in identifying them, potential solutions, and strategies to support slow learners in medical education.

Factors contributing to slower learners

Several factors influence slow learners, which can be categorized under the following topics: student, environment influences, and other reasons.

Student

Some students joined the medical course because of the compulsion of their parents; without interest, they joined the medical course. A recent study shows that 3.3% of MBBS students joined because of parental pressure, and 14.6% of the subjects had feelings of regret for choosing the medical profession.[3] Language barrier is one of the reasons; they studied their school education in their mother tongue and had difficulty coping with the English language.[4] Some students are shy in the presentation, such as those students not ready to ask questions or doubts to the teachers and also their friends. Some students naturally have a low understanding capacity. In India, the majority of the area is rural, and medical colleges are located in urban areas. Students from rural areas have more difficulty coping with the subject when compared to urban-background students. Some psychological problems, like an inferiority complex or stress, will also contribute to the slow learners. Health issues like obesity, hypothyroidism, Polycystic Ovarian Diseases (PCOD), etc. also, some reasons contribute to slow learners.

Environmental influences

Family problems, like a broken family, and other family issues also prevent the students from concentrating on their studies. Even socioeconomic status also plays a main role; among the slow learners, low-socioeconomic-status students do not get additional resources when compared to the high-socioeconomic-status students, and a few students in high-socioeconomic-status students do not give more importance to their studies.

The friends' circle of the students also determines factors for slow learners. Drug addiction, like alcohol or smoking, and others, will also contribute to slow learners, and this drug addiction will bring health issues that will cause less concentration in their studies. Nowadays, electronic gadget addiction among medical students is high; spending more time on that will cause the students not to have the time to study.[5]

Other reasons

The use of inappropriate teaching-learning methods for the required competency, inadequate or unavailable trained faculty, lack of facilities or resources, and an overly

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vast curriculum contribute to slow learning progress.

Challenges in identifying slow learners

Many institutes do not have guidelines to identify slow learners, and faculty members are often unaware or untrained in recognizing them. Some faculty show partiality between slow learners and advanced learners, unwilling to take extra steps to support those who struggle in their academic performance. Internal marks or exam scores alone do not categorize students as slow learners, as multiple factors contribute to their learning process. Additionally, there is a lack of regular feedback from students on teaching methods, which could help determine whether students understand the subject.

Many faculty members hold misconceptions about slow learners. Even when identified, there is often no time to categorize them properly, and even if they are categorized, no additional time is allocated to provide them with extra training.

A solution to identify the slow learners

The institution has established a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) to identify slow learners systematically. Faculty members are sensitized and trained to recognize such students department-wise. To foster an effective mentor-mentee relationship, mentors ensure students feel comfortable sharing their learning difficulties and personal challenges. Mentors focus not only on academic progress but also on identifying the root causes of slow learning. If needed, mentors may involve other faculty members with whom students are more at ease.

Additionally, parent-teacher or mentor-parent meetings are conducted to gather insights from parents about the students' challenges. While the primary focus is on identifying student-related causes of slow learning, the institution also acknowledges its potential role in contributing to the issue. Therefore, the SOP includes an evaluation of institutional and faculty-related factors that may hinder student progress, ensuring a comprehensive approach to addressing slow learning.

Support for students

To simplify the big chapter into small topics and give in the tables, an image form to better understand. Peer teaching-learning methods, and to use of innovative teaching and learning methods instead of the routine traditional teaching methods. More focus on small group teaching. To give more importance to formative assessment and use social media like WhatsApp and Telegram for sharing additional resources in the form of images and tables. To use appropriate teaching and learning methods based on the competency and to provide additional resource materials to the students through the Learning Management System (LMS). To conduct the parents' and teachers' meetings routinely.

To get regular feedback from the students regarding the teaching-learning methods, then only know the understanding level of the students, and that will be used for the teaching-learning methods. Regular faculty meetings on teaching and learning methods review and the outcome of those methods. To conduct the mini-test and give a few questions to read regularly, or to conduct the open-book test. Game-based learning and assessment will increase the students' interest and provide appreciation, like the words very good, nice, I appreciate you, etc.

Conclusion

Slow learners face multifaceted challenges in medical education, stemming from personal, environmental, and institutional factors. Effective identification through structured SOPs, mentorship, and innovative teaching methods can support their progress. Regular feedback, parental involvement, and tailored learning strategies enhance comprehension. Addressing these issues holistically ensures equitable academic growth for all students.

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