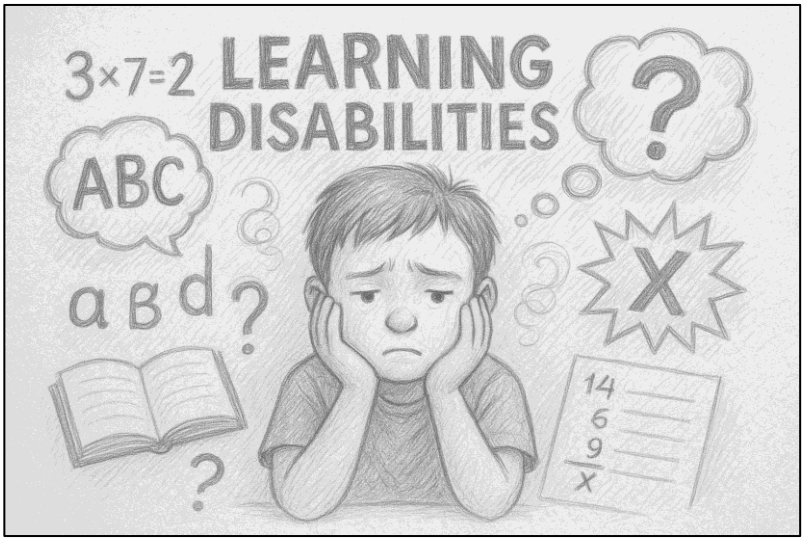
Chapter 3

Learning Disabilities



Academic Problems in the Classroom

Learning disabilities (LD) are among the most common difficulties encountered in schools. Students with learning disabilities may appear intelligent and motivated, yet they consistently struggle with academic tasks such as reading, writing, or mathematics. These challenges are not due to low intelligence, poor teaching, or lack of effort; instead, they result from differences in how the brain processes information.

In the classroom, students with learning disabilities may show:

- Difficulty reading fluently or understanding written texts.
- Problems spelling words or organizing ideas in writing.
- Challenges remembering basic math facts or solving word problems.
- Trouble following multi-step directions.
- Slow completion of tasks compared to peers.

These difficulties can affect self-esteem. A child may feel frustrated when classmates succeed easily while they struggle, which sometimes leads to behavioral issues or avoidance of schoolwork.

Definitions and Concepts of Learning Disabilities

A learning disability is defined as a neurological disorder that interferes with a person's ability to store, process, or produce information. Students with LD usually have average or above-average intelligence, but their academic performance does not match their potential. Key points:

- LD is lifelong, but with proper support, individuals can succeed.
- LD is specific, meaning a student may have trouble in one area (e.g., reading) but perform well in another (e.g., math).
- LD is different from intellectual disability, because students with LD do not have global cognitive delays.

Common types of learning disabilities include:

- **Dyslexia**: reading difficulties.
- **Dysgraphia**: writing and spelling difficulties.
- **Dyscalculia**: difficulties with numbers and mathematics.

Categories of Learning Disabilities

Learning disabilities are often divided into two main categories:

1. **Developmental Learning Disabilities**: These appear in early childhood and affect basic skills such as language, attention, or memory. For example, a child may struggle to recognize sounds in words, making reading development harder.
2. **Academic Learning Disabilities**: These are difficulties that specifically affect school subjects. Examples include

problems in reading comprehension, written expression, or solving math problems.

Both categories overlap, since early developmental challenges often lead to later academic struggles.

Characteristics of Children with Learning Disabilities

Although each child is unique, there are common characteristics that teachers and parents may notice:

- **Reading-related characteristics**: skipping words, confusing letters, or avoiding reading aloud.
- **Writing-related characteristics**: poor handwriting, reversed letters, or short and incomplete sentences.
- **Mathematics-related characteristics**: trouble with multiplication tables, difficulty aligning numbers, or misunderstanding word problems.
- **General learning characteristics**: poor memory, trouble following instructions, and difficulty organizing work.

It is important to note that children with LD often have strengths in other areas, such as creativity, oral communication, or problem-solving in real-life situations. Effective teaching focuses on both their challenges and strengths.

Teaching and Support Strategies

Teachers can help children with LD by:

- Using multi-sensory instruction (combining sight, sound, and movement).
- Breaking tasks into smaller steps.
- Providing extra time for assignments and tests.
- Using assistive technology, such as audiobooks or speech-to-text software.

- Giving positive reinforcement to build confidence.

Parents also play a vital role by encouraging their child, supporting homework routines, and celebrating small successes.

Practical Example

- A student with dyslexia may struggle to read a science textbook. The teacher can provide an audio recording of the text so the student can listen while following along.
- A student with dyscalculia may benefit from using physical objects (blocks, counters) to visualize math problems.
- A student with dysgraphia may use a computer instead of handwriting long essays.

Key Terms

English Term	Meaning in Arabic
Learning Disability	صعوبة التعلم
Dyslexia	عسر القراءة
Dysgraphia	عسر الكتابة
Dyscalculia	عسر الحساب

Questions and Answers

Q1: What are learning disabilities?

A1: They are neurological disorders that affect the brain's ability to process, store, or produce information.

Q2: How are learning disabilities different from intellectual disabilities?

A2: Students with LD usually have normal intelligence but specific academic difficulties, unlike intellectual disabilities which affect overall functioning.

Q3: Name three common types of learning disabilities.

A3: Dyslexia, dysgraphia, and dyscalculia.

Q4: What is the difference between developmental and academic learning disabilities?

A4: Developmental LD affects early skills like language or attention, while academic LD affects school subjects such as reading or math.

Q5: What are some classroom signs of a learning disability?

A5: Trouble reading fluently, difficulties with spelling, and problems solving math problems.

Q6: Why do children with LD sometimes develop low self-esteem?

A6: Because they may feel frustrated when they struggle with tasks that classmates complete easily.

Q7: How can teachers make learning easier for students with LD?

A7: By using multi-sensory methods, breaking tasks into steps, and giving extra time.

Q8: What is dyslexia?

A8: A reading disorder that involves difficulty with recognizing words and understanding text.

Q9: What is dysgraphia?

A9: A writing disorder that affects spelling, handwriting, and written expression.

Q10: Give an example of an assistive technology for students with LD.

A10: Speech-to-text software that allows students to speak their answers instead of writing them.

Q11: What strengths might children with LD show?

A11: Creativity, oral communication skills, and problem-solving abilities in real-life contexts.