



LEARNING DIFFICULTIES & MENTAL HEALTH AND PSYCOSOCIAL SUPPORT

CONSOLIDATED REPORT 2021-23



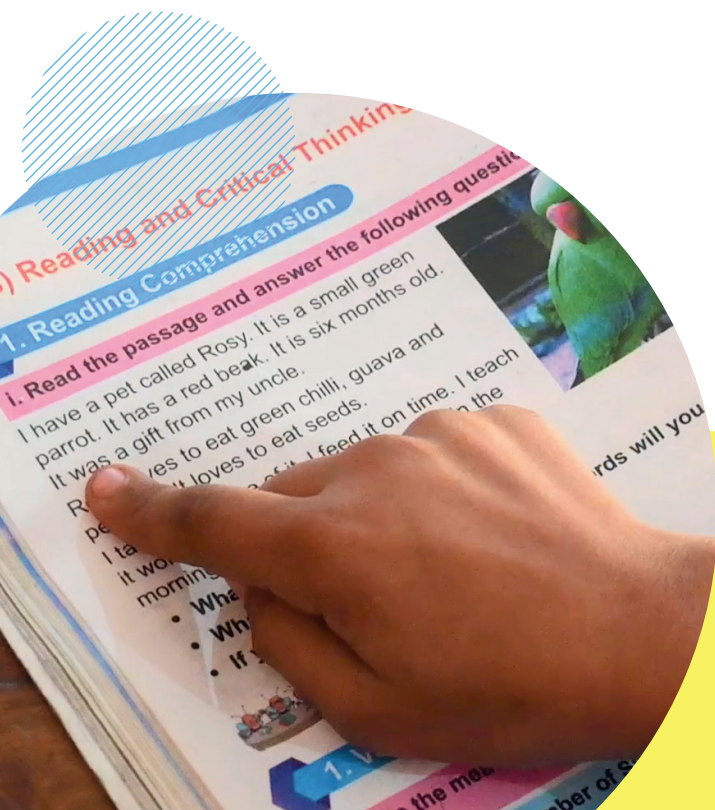
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ABBREVIATIONS

UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
ISU	Implementation Support Unit
DoE&SE	Directorate of Elementary and Secondary Education
KP	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa
ECW	Education Cannot Wait
MYRP	Multi-Year Resilience Program
RR	Regular Resource
MHPSS	Mental Health and Psychosocial Support
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
DCTE	Directorate of Curriculum and Teacher Education
DPD	Directorate of Professional Development
PFA	Psychological First Aid
PTC	Parent Teacher Council
SAG	Strategic Advisory Group



FOREWORD

Since our inception, ISU-DoE&SE has achieved numerous milestones in ensuring inclusive education for all children. I extend my sincere gratitude to all the individuals and organizations, especially UNICEF and ECW, that have supported our endeavors. Your unwavering dedication, collaboration, and hard work have been instrumental in our collective success. I extend heartfelt gratitude to Christine Wanjala (Education Manager, UNICEF), Syed Fawad Ali Shah (Education Specialist, UNICEF), Ms. Momina Ahmed (Education Officer, UNICEF), Samina Altaf (Director Education), all DEOs, Teachers, PTCs and the community members for their immense and continuous support and also being a part of our mission. Finally, I would like to recognize and laud the invaluable commitment of the ISU-DoE&SE staff towards making the project successful.

SYEDA UM-E-LAILA JAFFRY
DIRECTOR PROGRAMS
IMPLEMENTATION SUPPORT UNIT - DOE&SE



IMPLEMENTATION SUPPORT UNIT

Directorate of Elementary and Secondary Education, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

ISU is a notified unit within the DoE&SE with aims to strengthen government schools and the communities through effective initiatives pertaining to enhancing School Safety and Disaster Risk Reduction, strengthening Parent Teacher Councils, enhancing Early Childhood Education pedagogy, addressing Mental Health and Psychosocial Support, tackling Learning Difficulties, and providing various essential provisions to ensure continuity of education, everywhere, for every child. ISU-DoE&SE puts considerable resources and expertise into tackling Learning Difficulties in students and promoting Mental Health and Psychosocial Support for teachers, students as well the communities around them. It stresses on the formulation of highly effective strategies and targeted interventions aimed at providing much-needed assistance to students who confront diverse challenges associated with learning and mental health. ISU-DoE&SE puts unwavering commitment to the holistic development of education, with a particular emphasis on ensuring that all students, irrespective of their learning profiles, receive equitable opportunities and support to thrive within the educational system. Through the collaborative efforts of the ISU-DoE&SE, UNICEF, ECW, and the Directorate of Education, this initiative strives to pave the way for enhanced educational outcomes and holistic growth for every student.



LEARNING DIFFICULTIES AND MHPSS

Learning difficulties are a cluster of symptoms that lead individuals to struggle with certain language skills, particularly reading, writing, and mathematics. It affects people throughout their lives, but its effects can vary at various stages of an individual's life. MHPSS holds particular significance in educational settings, especially when considering the well-being of school children, teachers, and the communities surrounding schools. Schools are not only centers for academic learning but also crucial environments for social and emotional development. The mental health and psychosocial needs of individuals within these settings are interconnected, and addressing them collectively fosters a supportive and conducive learning environment.

Recognizing and addressing Learning Difficulties as well as providing MHPSS is crucial in ensuring an inclusive and supportive learning environment within government schools. Supporting the identification and addressing of learning difficulties in government school students is essential for early intervention, fostering academic success, and promoting inclusive education practices. By equipping teachers with tools to tailor teaching methods, this support enhances teachers effectiveness and prevents potential long-term consequences such as anxiety and disengagement. Simultaneously, providing MHPSS contributes to the holistic development of government school students, creating a supportive learning environment, building resilience, and promoting healthy relationships. MHPSS interventions also improve teacher's well-being, enabling them to manage diverse classroom dynamics and cultivate a positive and inclusive atmosphere.



Director Programs ISU-DoE&SE, Um-e-Laila Jaffery, visiting a training on Learning Difficulties



Education Specialist UNICEF, Syed Fawad Ali Shah alongside Education Manager UNICEF, Christine Wanjala and Director Programs, ISU-DoE&SE

ACTIVITIES

Under ECW's MYRP, alongside the utilization of its regular resources, the ISU-DoE&SE, with the technical and financial assistance of UNICEF, has embarked on a series of initiatives as part of its Learning Difficulties and MHPSS mandate. These activities are integral components of the broader effort to address the educational and psychosocial needs of students as well as teachers, particularly those affected by crises or conflicts. The collaborative approach between ECW, ISU-DoE&SE, and UNICEF emphasizes the importance of leveraging technical expertise and financial resources to implement effective strategies. Below is the list of activities undertaken by ISU-DoE&SE:

Development of Manuals on Learning Difficulties and Mental Health & Psychosocial Support

Teachers Training of on Learning Difficulties

Teachers Training on Mental Health & Psychosocial Support

Quantitative Study on Children having Learning Difficulties

Qualitative Study on Children having Learning Difficulties

Strategic Advisory Group Meeting

Follow-up Sessions at Selected Schools

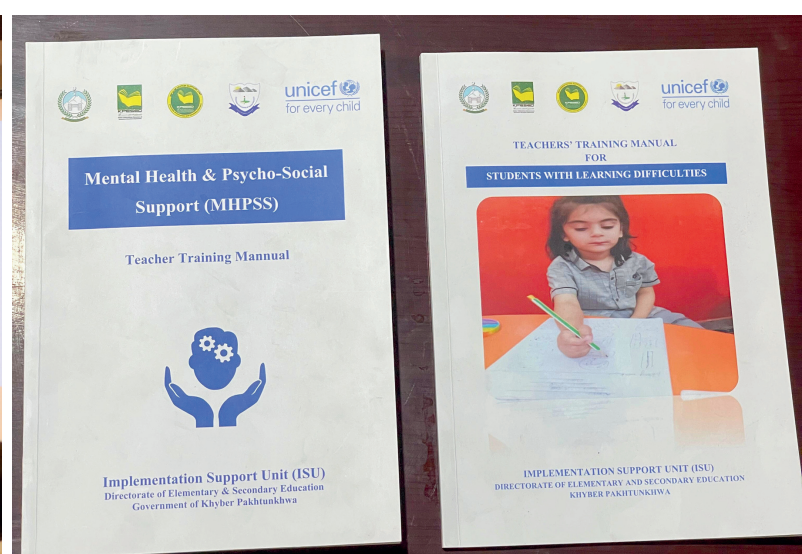
DEVELOPMENT OF MANUALS ON LEARNING DIFFICULTIES AND MHPSS

The imperative for comprehensive teacher training manuals addressing Learning Difficulties and MHPSS cannot be overstated for government teachers. Government school teachers at the primary level play a pivotal role in shaping the educational journey of students, especially those encountering learning difficulties or psychological distress. A specialized training manual equips teachers with the necessary knowledge and skills to identify, understand, and effectively address learning difficulties. Moreover, it provides insights into implementing MHPSS strategies, fostering a supportive and nurturing environment within classrooms. These manuals serve as invaluable resources, empowering teachers to employ evidence-based practices tailored to the diverse needs of their student as well as creation of inclusive learning spaces, ensuring that every child, irrespective of their challenges, receives the attention and support required to thrive academically and emotionally.

ISU-DoE&SE, with the technical and financial assistance of UNICEF, formulated comprehensive teachers training manuals for teachers with practical guidance, offering remedial strategies and techniques for effectively addressing both Learning Difficulties and mental health issues among students. Furthermore, ISU-DoE&SE conducted a three-day review meeting with the DCTE on the said manuals with the primary objective of reviewing and endorsing both manuals. The meticulous review, led by the committee and experts, thoroughly examined every aspect of the documents and its contents. Following a comprehensive assessment, the manuals on MHPSS and Learning Difficulties received endorsement from experts representing DCTE, Peshawar University, and relevant fields.



Education Specialist UNICEF, Syed Fawad Ali Shah addressing the participants at the review session.



Endorsed manuals pertaining to Learning Difficulties and MHPSS

TEACHERS TRAINING ON LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

With the technical and financial assistance of UNICEF, ISU-DoE&SE undertook a comprehensive three-day training program at the district level titled "Dealing with Children having Learning Difficulties" at districts Kohat, Mansehra, Peshawar, Chitral, and North Waziristan. Expert trainers from the ISU-DoE&SE led these impactful sessions. and the training was facilitated using an approved teacher training manual meticulously developed in consultation with the DPD, DCTE, and the E&SE. The program aimed at equipping teachers with effective strategies to address the diverse learning needs of students, promoting inclusivity in primary education across various districts. The trained teachers are implementing specialized techniques tailored for identified children facing Learning Difficulties. Additionally, a well-established referral mechanism is in place to extend essential psychosocial support to both the children and their parents. Moreover, these trained teachers diligently monitor the progress of their students, ensuring a personalized approach that enhances their learning outcomes. Below is a district-wise breakdown of the participants.

Districts	Male	Female	Total
Kohat	50	50	100
Mansehra	215	235	450
Peshawar	205	195	400
Chitral	25	25	50
North Waziristan	25	25	50
Total	520	530	1,050

1,050
PRIMARY
SCHOOL
TEACHERS

comprising of **520 males** and **530 females** were trained under the training.

22,048
STUDENTS

comprising of **12,220 girls** and **9,828 boys** received assistance of trained teachers, along with counseling and specialized techniques.



Participants during the Learning Difficulties training



Participants presenting their group work during the Learning Difficulties training



Participants brainstorming over groupwork during the training

TEACHERS TRAINING ON MHPSS

Teachers play a paramount role in providing MHPSS to their students and in sustaining resilient education systems – and supporting teachers' own well-being is essential if they are to fulfil this role. The ISU-DoE&SE, with technical and financial support from UNICEF, conducted training sessions for teachers on MHPSS and Psychological First Aid. The primary objectives of these sessions were to empower primary school teachers with a comprehensive understanding of psychological and mental well-being, stress management, and the importance of providing PFA and MHPSS. Additionally, the training aimed to equip teachers with a profound understanding of mental health issues prevalent among school children, fostering a supportive and resilient educational environment. The trained teachers effectively administered PFA to these students, aiding in their emotional well-being. Moreover, they actively disseminated information and techniques to PTC members on managing stress, developing confidence, and dealing with hardships. Nevertheless, few cases which were of severe condition, were referred to clinical psychologists. District-wise participant data is given below:

Districts	Male	Female	Total
Kohat	38	37	75
Mansehra	75	75	150
Peshawar	65	60	125
Total	178	172	350

350
PRIMARY
SCHOOL
TEACHERS

comprising of **178 males** and **172 females** were trained under this training.

7,038
STUDENTS

comprising of **4,220 girls** and **2,818 boys** received assistance of trained teachers, along with counseling and specialized techniques.

1,832
AFGHAN
REFUGEE
STUDENTS

inclusive of **965 girls** and **867 boys** benefitted from trained teachers.



Participants assembling at the end of the MHPSS training at district Peshawar



Participants showcasing their groupwork during the MHPSS training



Trainer apprising the participants on the 1st day of the MHPSS training at district Mansehra

QUANTITATIVE STUDY ON CHILDREN HAVING LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

The ISU-DoE&SE conducted a comprehensive study on children facing Learning Difficulties in districts Mansehra and Peshawar, yielding valuable insights. The study aimed to gain a comprehensive understanding of the prevalent challenges within the educational landscape. The primary objective was to identify and assess the specific learning difficulties encountered by students within schools with a focus on reading (Dyslexia), writing (Dysgraphia), and mathematics (Dyscalculia). It aimed to provide data-driven insights into the extent and nature of learning difficulties, informing evidence-based interventions and support strategies. The findings from this study will play a crucial role in tailoring educational approaches to address the diverse needs of students, promoting inclusivity and fostering a more supportive learning environment in the targeted districts.

100,261
STUDENTS

comprising of **53,986 boys** & **46,275 girls** were screened in a total of **700 schools** comprising **350 boys** and **350 girls** schools.

29%
STUDENTS

were identified as having mild-level Learning Difficulties.

15%
STUDENTS

were identified as having moderate-level Learning Difficulties.

2%
STUDENTS

were identified as having severe-level Learning Difficulties.

QUALITATIVE STUDY ON CHILDREN HAVING LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

Following the recommendations made by the SAG members, the team of psychologists within the ISU-DoE&SE conducted an extensive qualitative study encompassing all facts of Learning Difficulties within District Mansehra. The qualitative study aimed to investigate and comprehend the prevalence and characteristics of various Learning Difficulties. By investigating into these aspects, ISU-DoE&SE, with the technical and financial support of UNICEF, intends to develop targeted and evidence-based strategies to effectively support students and promote an inclusive learning environment. The study underwent the following process:

Development of tools for FGDs

A tailored questionnaire for FGDs was crafted by synthesizing insights from literature and collaborating with diverse experts, including speech/language pathologists, educational assessment specialists, and psychologists.

Selection of schools

A total of **50 schools**, comprising **25 boys** and **25 girls'** schools each, were chosen from District Mansehra. The selection criteria were based on the prevalence of a high ratio of Learning Difficulties, as identified in the previous quantitative study.

Assessment of identified students

Detailed assessment was carried out during a series of FGDs. This assessment involved interviewing students, administering IQ tests to gauge their cognitive abilities, and evaluating their motivation and personality traits. Additionally, interviews were conducted with a total of **450 students**, and insights were gathered part of this comprehensive assessment process.

Discussions with teachers of identified students

In-depth interviews and discussions were conducted with the class teachers of Identified students. These interviews were meticulously designed to evaluate various facets of the teachers' professional performance, encompassing their proficiency, communication abilities, and pedagogical methods during classroom instruction. Furthermore, the teachers' teaching methodologies and the amount of time they dedicated to students were explored. Additionally, teachers were inquired about the specific interventions they employed when working with children facing Learning Difficulties. During assessment a Total of **150 teachers** from 50 schools, covering classes 2, 3, and 4, participated in the focus group discussions

Interviews with parents of identified students

Comprehensive interviews were conducted with the parents of the identified students as part of the FGDs. These interviews involved inquiries about the parents' educational backgrounds, socioeconomic statuses, their relationships with their children, and the amount of time they spent with their children.

Analysis and interpretation of data

During the analysis of the FGDs, a systematic approach was employed to identify recurring patterns and insights from the interviews and interpretations. This process resulted in the categorization of issues pertaining to Learning Difficulties into three primary themes: internal, external, and student-oriented, detailed below.

Internal Challenges

Management Challenges

- Inability to balance academic and other tasks.
- Difficulty in time management.
- Overburdened schedule
- Lack of teachers.
- Difficult coursework

Teacher's Perspective

- Lack of prerequisite knowledge.
- Inadequate communication skills.
- Misperception and ignorance to children with learning difficulties.
- Lack of skills and knowledge regarding learning difficulties.
- Inadequate sitting arrangements and low interaction with students.

External Challenges

Parental Perspective

- Ignoring their child and comparing them with others.
- Lack of education and awareness.
- Inconducive education environment.
- Lack of concentration on their children's education.

Domestic Challenges

- Limited interaction with siblings.
- Fights and quarrels with siblings.
- Lack of family support.

Student-related Challenges

Peer Related

- Stigmatization by fellow students.
- Lack of interaction with other students
- Fights and quarrels with fellow students.

Behavioural

- Lack of confidence.
- Easily angered.
- Feeling isolated.
- Frequent absenteeism
- ADHD tendencies.



FGDs being conducted with teachers of the GPS Naran, District Mansehra



Student of the GPS Batakundi being interviewed by ISU-DoE&SE's psychologist



Parent of a child from GPS Naran, being interviewed by ISU-DoE&SE's psychologist

STRATEGIC ADVISORY GROUP MEETINGS

The SAG serves as a pivotal forum strategically established by the ISU-DoE&SE. This forum convenes annually and brings together eminent experts in the field of psychology hailing from various regions across the country. The overarching objective of the SAG is to deliberate and formulate informed recommendations pertaining to the amplification and expansion of interventions specifically designed to cater to the needs of children struggling with learning difficulties. In 2023, the primary purpose of the SAG meeting was to review and discuss the findings of qualitative studies regarding primary school children experiencing Learning Difficulties for the purpose of gaining a deeper understanding of the obstacles to learning these children face by focusing on qualitative aspects. The meeting was attended by:

Academia

The presence of academics, including researchers and educators, at the meeting demonstrates the participation of specialists who conducted or were closely associated with children having learning difficulties. Their participation ensured that those who comprehend the significance of such an intervention and its impact, discussed the research findings.

Government Officials

The presence of government officials at the meeting demonstrates the importance of government participation in addressing the challenges faced by children with learning difficulties. These officials represented relevant departments responsible for education and the training of educators. Their presence indicates a commitment to addressing these issues at the policy level while possibly implementing improvements that may improve the situation.

Clinical and Child Psychologists

Clinical and child psychologists play an essential role in understanding the psychological and emotional aspects of children with learning difficulties. Their expertise is invaluable in developing strategies for providing these children with the appropriate support and interventions that are tailored to their specific needs. Their insights can contribute to a holistic approach and a comprehensive strategy for addressing the challenges at hand.



Members of the SAG meeting, 2023, posing for a group photo

FOLLOW UP SESSION FOR CHILDREN WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

Conducting follow-up sessions in schools across districts Peshawar and Mansehra, our dedicated team of psychologists imparted valuable insights to teachers on remedial strategies for students facing Learning Difficulties. The data collected from these sessions plays a pivotal role in formulating strategic interventions aimed at enhancing the overall quality of education and addressing the specific needs of students encountering Learning Difficulties. To date, our psychologist team has successfully conducted follow-up sessions in **150 schools**, prioritizing gender balance with **65 girls and 85 boys schools**, aiding teachers in the identification and provision of support to **1,386 students** facing learning difficulties, including **746 girls**.



ISU-DoE&SE's psychologists orienting and conducting follow-up visits for students, teachers and PTC members



MAHA BIBI

Government Girls Primary School, Jallo, District Mansehra

Under the auspices of ECW's MYRP, a significant activity undertaken by ISU-DoE&SE is the Training of Teachers on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) and addressing Learning Difficulties. In pursuit of this objective, a team of psychologists has been actively engaged in enhancing teachers' competencies. This initiative aims to empower teachers with the ability to identify students facing Learning Difficulties and effectively address the challenges they encounter within the school environment, thereby promoting improved and high-quality learning outcomes. Furthermore, ISU-DoE&SE's commitment extends beyond capacity building. The intention is not only to equip teachers with knowledge but also to provide ongoing support and guidance in the field. Various strategies are being employed to enhance the learning process for children identified as having learning difficulties, ensuring they receive the necessary assistance for academic growth and development.

Amidst the follow-up visits made by ISU-DoE&SE's psychologist in District Mansehra, a heartening narrative unfolded. It became evident that the training initiatives designed to empower teachers with insights into addressing learning difficulties had sparked a transformative journey in the realm of education. A singular story stood out. It was the tale of young Maha Bibi, a student at GGPS Jallo. Her journey, like a delicate flower unfolding, symbolized the potential unleashed by these initiatives.

In the quiet village of UC Jallo, nestled in District Mansehra, there was a school called GGPS Jallo. It was a place where ISU-DoE&SE's training found a practical home. Among the students, there was Maha Bibi, a fourth-grader and the daughter of Muhammad Yasir. Maha had her unique journey, marked by both challenges and potential. Miss Bushra, a dedicated teacher at GGPS Jallo, shared her observations during a follow-up visit by the Psychologist. She recounted the days when Maha struggled to focus on her studies, her restlessness often spilling into classroom behavior. The teachers, armed with strategies and insights gleaned from the ISU-DoE&SE's trainings, had tried their best to guide Maha towards progress. Yet, the breakthrough they sought remained elusive.

The psychologist conducted counseling sessions with Maha Bibi, uncovering the underlying reasons for her behavioral challenges. One prominent factor was the negative influence of her stepmother, which significantly impacted her behavior in the classroom. During these sessions, Maha bravely shared her experiences of being bullied by her classmates, who unkindly referred to her as "Kaali" due to her physical appearance. When asked if she had friends in class, her response was poignant: "Koi mujh se dosti nahi karta kiun kay mein kaali hun" (No one befriends me because I'm dark). Maha's family situation was intricate, with one older sister who had special needs and three step-siblings, including two brothers and a sister. Her father, a barber by trade, wasn't regularly present at home, adding to the family's challenges.

Following a series of consistent psychological sessions with Maha Bibi and the guidance provided by the psychologist to Maha's teachers regarding her fellow students' bullying behavior, along with the determined efforts of Miss Bushra, the head teacher of GGPS Jallo, a remarkable transformation took place in Maha's life. A newfound radiance could be seen in Maha's demeanor as she began arriving at school with a smile adorning her face. Her academic performance underwent a steady improvement, and her newfound concentration on her studies was evident. The combined efforts of Miss Bushra and the ISU psychologist played a pivotal role in providing Maha Bibi with the necessary psychosocial support. Furthermore, her family was sensitized to the importance of a child's psychological well-being and its direct impact on academic performance. Miss Bushra, Maha's teacher, mentioned with joy;

Thanks to ECW and ISU, a visible change can be felt in Maha's behavior. These efforts need to be consistent as such followup visits should be a regular feature to aid in identifying and supporting efforts against mental health issues of children in schools. A child's psychological health is equally important as physical health for a prosperous academic performance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Teachers who are unfamiliar with the terminology and concepts pertaining to learning difficulties should be provided with adequate awareness. This point emphasizes the significance of training and educating teachers who may lack sufficient knowledge about learning difficulties. Teachers need to recognize the various forms of Learning Difficulties, their symptoms, and the challenges that are faced by students with these conditions.
- The In-Service Training, Induction Program, and Continuous Professional Development should regularly be arranged to address the needs of students with Learning Difficulties. In-service teacher training refers to professional development sessions for currently employed teachers. This point highlights the need for specialized training that focuses on understanding and supporting students with a specific Learning Difficulty. Teachers should be equipped with practical strategies and tips to effectively support and accommodate these students in the classroom setting.
- The government should provide the required enabling facilities, tools, and resources to ensure that proper assessment and assistance are made available to students with Learning Difficulties as the need arises. This point emphasizes the role of the government in ensuring that appropriate resources and support are available for them. This could include funding for assessments, assistive technology, and other learning-enhancing resources.
- Parental Counselling is a key component. Teachers should counsel the parents of slow learners to understand their child's condition, emphasizing their strengths and abilities while deemphasizing their weaknesses. Teachers should play a role in guiding parents of slow learners to better understand their child's learning needs. This involves highlighting the child's strengths and talents, fostering a positive outlook, and working collaboratively with parents to support the child's development.
- Awareness sessions and Teacher Training Programs on children with Learning Difficulties should be extended to other districts, with a particular emphasis on the Newly Merged Districts.

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