



## LEARNING DIFFICULTIES AMONG FIRST YEAR UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS IN FEDERAL COLLEGE OF EDUCATION, YOLA

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**Abubakar Hussaini Yoffo**

Department of Educational Psychology,  
Federal College of Education, Yola Adamawa State, Nigeria  
Email: abubakarhussaini121@gmail.com

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### INTRODUCTION

The term "Learning difficulties" otherwise known as learning disabilities is a very general one, widely without much precision and is refers to the general problems in learning experienced by some 10 to 16 percent of the school population (National Health and Medical Research Council, 1990). The term learning difficulties has been used by Educational Psychologists in the United Kingdom since the 1980's to refers to mental retardation (Tambawal, 2010). Undergraduate students encounter some difficulties in their studies. Some of these students overcome these problems as time passed on. Sometimes these problems may be the beginning of failure and even drop in their studentship (Ogbebor, 2010). Strydom (2009) opined that learning difficulties is an all-embracing term for children with any type of learning problems. Learning difficulties is a disorder in which a person has a difficulty to learn effectively, caused by an unknown factor(s). One of the unknown factor is the disorder that affects the brains ability to receive and process information (Wikipedia, 2009). Kolo in Kolawole (2010) defines Learning difficulties as a cluster of inabilities that manifest in reading, writing and oral expression, simple numerical calculations, spelling and writing. Moreover, Giwa and Kolawole (2010), said, a child has greater difficulty if the child has a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of children of the same age. Learning difficulties is seen by Ugwu in Ukwueze (2010) as a learning disability where a child posses adequate, mental ability and sensory process but cannot utilize them maximally thereby performing at a level far below his capacity. Shukla in Ukwueze (2010) sees learning difficulties as disorders of the basic psychological processes that affect the way a child learns which may include difficulties in listening, thinking, reading, writing, spelling or arithmetic. Thus, students who are with learning difficulties are therefore conceptualized as students who are academically incompetent and rejected by their peers. These students are at risk of failing or dropping out of school. Learning difficulty is defined

by Yusuf (2002) as the inability of learners to comprehend or grasp the basic essentials for instructional activities at different stages of learning. Such individuals according to her do not learn at the same pace with their mates and most of the time they performed below expectation. According to Ekwe in Aghadinazu and Ajoku (2017), learning disabled children experience difference in implementing some of the basic issues which form the foundations of education, such as thinking, talking, listening, reading, writing, speaking and computing simple arithmetic. Children and adolescents with such disability are of normal intelligence or above and have difference in at least one academic area and usually several which include problem in listening, concentrating, speaking and thinking and their difficulty cannot be attributed to any other diagnosed problem or disorder such as mental retardation. Raymond, in Aghadinazu and Ajoku (2017) learning disability is a stumbling block which needs to be removed for one to perform maximally.

Simeon (2004), Sierra and David (2007) and Sierra (2007) in their separate studies reported that fresh undergraduates encountered certain study problems in the first year in the university. Such problems include those of concentration ability, memory ability, study time management ability, attention problems, and ability to join other students in study group work and problems of self-concept. Nellie in Ogbebor and Oghounu, (2011), stated that students in universities have such problems as paying attention. The reasons for this according to them may include boredom, sleep deprivation, a cold, poor nutrition among others. Thus attention can also be affected when students are experiencing depression, anxiety or chronic illness. Students with attention problems may not focus when a lesson is being presented, have a short attention span, be easily distracted and have poor concentration ability (Yusuf, 2002). Ajayi and Osiki (2008) reported that students find it difficult to follow their work schedules, which they are found of delaying their assignment till a more convenient time and so often submit their assignment at the dying minute. They feel reluctant in performing tasks that ought to be done urgently and would always wait for the last minutes to study for examination. The studies also reveal that some effects of poor time management include:-

- i. That poor time management is a time killer, promotes poor academic performance, produces anxiety and its effects on one's nervous system that it could hinder achievement in life endeavour.

- ii. That deadline are not often met due to postponement of tasks that may lead to lots of opportunities, so delays, success generally in life. They concluded that the issue of poor time management among students may not guarantee effective learning and good academic performance.

Ogbebor (2010) found that difficulties experienced by undergraduates on study problems of concentration and memory problems are similar, but there are differences on time management, attention and group work, the extent of the effect differ. Ogbebor and Oghounu (2011) also found that difficulties experienced by undergraduates male and female on study problems of concentration and self-concepts are similar, but there are differences on problems of memory, time management, attention and group work.

Ogbebor (2010) and Oghounu (2011) Investigation sought to determine the extent of learning difficulties encountered by undergraduate students in Federal College of Education, Yola under the following:-

- a. Concentration difficulties
  - b. Memory difficulties
  - c. Time management difficulties
  - d. Attention problems and
  - e. Compulsory group work activities.
- a) **Concentration Difficulties:** Concentration meant focus interest and attention at one thing at a time. It is human for several thought to flash across one mind every now and then; therefore, concentration difficulties mean the extra efforts that are often required by someone with hidden disabilities to complete a task (Akinade, 2002). Richardson, Tolks, Sgouris and Bowery in Ogbebor (2010) opined that concentration difficulties occur if the task is very demanding. These difficulties may be overwhelming and exhausting. Do not day dream or if you do, check it with determination.
- b) **Memory Difficulties:** Whatever is learned needs to be somehow stored in the mind so that it can be utilized whenever required in the future. This faculty of the mind to store the past experiences or learning and to reproduce them for use when required at a time is known as Memory (Manga, 2012) Memory difficulties according to Bungay, Morrison, Denderick in Ogbebor, (2010) is the inability to store information, so that the individual is unable to retrieved such

information when it becomes necessary as a result of time management difficulties.

- c) ***Time Management Difficulties:*** Allen and Kennard in Ogbebor (2010) defined time management as ability to organize one's time for proper utilization, for example scheduling and the appropriate use of time enhance studying itself. It is therefore, expected to note that the time approved and plan for your work accordingly. Wikipedia defines Management as the organization and coordination of the activities of an enterprise in accordance with certain policies and in achievement of clearly defined objectives. It is necessary to draw attention to any problem that may affect objectives.
- d) ***Attention Problem:*** Holy, Hoy in Ogbebor (2010) contends that attention difficulties for studies arise when the students cannot pay attention to a study situation when need be for learning to take place, learners should focus all their attention on what they are learning individually or group activities.
- e) ***Compulsory Group Work Activities:*** Buzen in Ogbebor (2010) says that this is when the students are put in groups for the purposes of completing a study assignment.

## **STATEMENT OF PROBLEM**

Any person associated with the academic environment will appreciate the importance of studying. Although persons may differ on why people study, (Some people study out of curiosity others study only to pass examinations). There is no dispute that if students are to show high academic performance, they could not only need to study hard but also need to know how to study. Over the years, as Lecturer in the Department of Educational Psychology in Federal College of Education, Yola, the researcher has observed that undergraduate students of the College fail several courses during their first year and so carry over these to the second year. In this way, they build very poor foundations from their onset. This is the situation across the various departments of the College. Learning and Remembering strategies, examination anxiety, interest, motivation and other related variables in their general content and context as they affect students' academic performance. However, many attentions have not being given to learning difficulties among undergraduate students. Therefore, to fill this gab, this study subjected to sought the magnitude of concentration problems, memory problems, problems of management of study time, problem of attention to study

and problems of participation in study group encountered by undergraduate students in Federal College of Education, Yola.

### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the extent of learning difficulties encountered by undergraduate students in Federal College of Education, Yola. The specific learning difficulties to be investigated includes:-

- i. Concentration difficulties
- ii. Memory difficulties
- iii. Time Management difficulties
- iv. Attention problems and
- v. Compulsory group work activities

### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

1. Do undergraduate students in Federal College of Education, Yola experience concentration problems in their studies?
2. Do the undergraduate students experience memory difficulties in their studies?
3. Do they have time management difficulties?
4. Are there serious attention difficulties experienced by undergraduate students in their studies?
5. Do the undergraduate students experience any difficulty while participating in compulsory group work?

### **METHODS**

The study is an exploratory one that used a descriptive survey design. Therefore, it was not rigorous with respect to sampling. The sample for the study was derived from all the 100 Level undergraduate students across the five schools in Federal College of Education, Yola in 2018/2019 academic session with a total of 450 students. All the students that were present in EDU 101 Lecture were used. The questionnaires were administered to 450 students and were successfully retrieved (240 were Males and 200 Females) that was 100% return rate. 100 Level students were used in the study. 100 Level students were chosen on the assumption that they have spent less time in the college system; therefore, they might have one form of learning difficulty.

The Instrument used for Data Collection was a structured questionnaire title First Year Undergraduates Learning Difficulties Questionnaire

(FYULDQ) adopted from Ogbebor (2010) which was designed to investigate the Learning Difficulties among undergraduate students in Delta State University. The Instrument was divided into two sections, Section 'A' and Section 'B'. Section 'A' deals with the Bio-data of the respondents while Section 'B' is made up of seven items, with each item eliciting responses about each of the five variables studied (see appendixes) the Researcher administered the questionnaire in a class setting and the responses were collected from the respondents immediately they had responded. Descriptive Statistics was used to analyze the data and this involved mainly percentage.

## **RESULTS**

This was done through answering each of the five research questions raised to guide the study. The table below represents the data analyzed for all the five (5) research questions. In the questionnaire, alternative A and B indicated serious problem while alternative C and D indicates less problems. Eventually all the respondents indicated that they have one learning difficulty or the other.

**Table 1: Present summary of percentage value of undergraduate students on study difficulties of concentration, memory, time management, attention and group work**

176 (39.1%)	Intense concentration Difficulties	1 Concentration
	Less concentration Difficulties	
274 (60.9%)	No concentration Difficulties	2 Memory
	Intense Memory Difficulties	
350 (77.8%)	Less Memory Difficulties	3 Time Management
	No Memory Difficulties	
100 (22.2%)	Intense Time Management Difficulties	4 Attention
	Less Time Management Difficulties	
125 27.8%	No Time Management Difficulties	5 Group Work Problem
	Serious Attention Problem	
325 (72.29%)	Less Attention Problem	
	No Attention Problem	
190 (42.2%)	Group Work Problem	
	Less Group Work Problem	
260 (57.8%)	No Group Work Problem	
120 (26.7%)		
330 (73.3%)		

Table 1 above shows that 176 (39.1%) of 440 respondents have intense concentration difficulties compared to 274 (60.9%) of the 440

respondents have less concentration difficulties. On memory difficulties, 350 (77.8%) of the 440 respondents have intense memory difficulties as against 100 (22.2%) who have less memory difficulties. With regard to time management, 125 (27.8%) of the 440 respondents have intense time management difficulties while 325 (72.29%) of the 440 respondents have less time management difficulties in their studies, furthermore, 190 (42.2%) of the 440 respondents have serious attention difficulties compared to 260 (57.8%) with less attention difficulties.

Finally, it was revealed that out of the 440 respondents only 120 (26.7%) have intense group work difficulties compared to 330 (73.3%) of the 440 respondents have less difficulties in the ability to join other students in study group work.

## **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

The purpose of this study was to investigate learning difficulties experienced by first year undergraduate students in Federal College of Education, Yola. The findings of the study showed the concentration difficulties are there among the first year undergraduate students. Those with intense difficulties 176 (39.1%) as compared to those with less difficulty were 274 (60.9%). This shows that students have less concentration difficulties; the study confirms the findings of earlier research by Ogbebor (2010) who reported that less concentration difficulties among undergraduate students in Delta State University, Abraka. The study also revealed on the issue of memory problems 350 (77.8%) experienced intense memory problem compared to 160 (22.2%) has less problems. This is in agreement with the earlier findings of Tambuwal, (2010) who established that learning difficulty is a phenomenon that affect students and is a heterogeneous disorder which possess difficulty in reading, writing and mathematical calculations. The result is also in line with Simeon (2004) who revealed a very high percentage of students with memory problems.

Furthermore, the study also revealed that there is less time management difficulties among undergraduate students of Federal College of Education, Yola with 325 (72.2%) have less time management as compared to 125 (27.8%) with tense time management. Time management by students was a subject of study by Janet (2002) where he stated that students overcome this with time. This coincide with Ajayi and Osiki (2008) whose findings among others included that students find it difficult to follow their work schedules, they are fond of delaying their



assignment till a more convenient time and so often submit their assignment at the dying minutes. This might not be unconnected with the leniency of Lecturer and lack of self-confidence.

The study also revealed that 190 (42.2%) with serious attention problems as compared to 260 (57.8%) who had less attention problem. Aaron in Ogbemor (2010) stated that attention usually constitutes problems to more students especially those who are fresh in the university. Nellie (2003) stated that students in universities have such problems of paying attention. He states that the reason for this may include boredom, sleep deprivation, a cold, poor nutrition among others. That attention can also be affected when students are experiencing depression, anxiety or chronic illness. Finally, the study indicated that 120 (26.7%) has group work problems as compared to 330 (73.3%) who had less problem. This is however is contrary to the findings of Amada (2009) who relate difficulties in group work among students in the university.

## **CONCLUSION**

The finding showed that to obtain better results in learning, one has to hold the subjects attention for desirable length of time without disruption. One has to make serious and deliberate efforts to sustain attention by taking care of all factors such as concentration and memory difficulties among others, so as to overcome all such forces of distraction.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

In the light of this conclusion it is recommended that:

- i. Orientation programmes to be organized by the Academic Office of the College. This will be with the involvement of the Guidance and Counseling Unit and the Students' Affairs Unit of the College. In such orientation programmes, the issue of the problems of concentration during studies and ways to enhance memory may be addressed.
- ii. Ways of proper management of available time for studies should be part of the initial orientation for the first year Students. The College Management should find ways of minimizing noise in the students' Hostels, around Classes and Libraries.
- iii. The College needs to provide Handbooks for first year Students on study problems. This may be given as separate

Handbook or part of Students Handbook issued to all the  
College students new entrants.

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## APPENDIX 1

### Questionnaire

Every information given here are kept confidential

Tick where appropriate

#### Section 'A'

Male  Female

Level: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Section 'B'

1. Concentration Difficulties

Intense  Not much  Sometimes  Not at all

2. Memory Difficulties

Intense  Not much  Sometimes  Not at all

3. Time Management

Not able to manage my study time   
No much difficulty   
I manage my study time well   
Not of any concern to me

4. Attention Difficulties

Find it difficult to pay attention to my studies   
Normal much difficult here   
Sometimes find difficulties   
I don't find difficult to pay attention to my study

5. Difficulties in Compulsory Group work

I have a lot of difficulty here   
I do not have much difficulty

6. How do you perceive relation to others in your self-ability to study?

I feel I cannot cope in study ability among other students  
I manage to cope   
I cope well   
I cope very well

7. Rate the environment difficulties experienced by you in your study

Rate them in other of Magnitude: A – E

Noise  Interruption  Lighting  Comfort  Equipment