

INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY VS. MEMORY AND ATTENTION CHALLENGES: UNDERSTANDING THE KEY DIFFERENCES

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Many individuals often mistake intellectual disability for basic memory issues. Although both can entail difficulties in acquiring or remembering information, they represent two distinct conditions with unique causes, features, and effects on everyday life. Grasping these distinctions is crucial for offering appropriate assistance and preventing misunderstandings.

Learners with intellectual disabilities experience memory impairments, leading to challenges in recalling information and issues with self-regulation. The phrase “intellectual disability” is a clinical term and may only be applied to individuals who have received a medical diagnosis from a developmental pediatrician; however, those individuals who lack a medical diagnosis but are noted to have memory issues should be seen as having trouble with recall or focus. Robert L Schalock (2021)

Intellectual disability may stem from genetic disorders such as Down syndrome and Fragile X syndrome; prenatal influences like fetal alcohol syndrome or maternal infections; complications during birth such as oxygen deprivation or early delivery; and postnatal factors including serious infections, brain trauma, or inadequate nutrition. It is typically categorized into four levels: mild, where the individual can acquire basic daily and practical skills and may live independently with minimal support; moderate, where the individual can handle some daily activities but requires regular assistance; severe, where the individual needs considerable help with daily tasks; and profound, where full-time care and continuous supervision are necessary.

Medical professionals define intellectual disability as involving restrictions in cognitive abilities such as challenges in learning, reasoning, and problem-solving as well as limitations in adaptive behavior, which encompasses difficulties in managing daily life tasks like self-care, financial handling, and social engagement, in addition to weak communication skills and trouble adhering to rules or routines; these symptoms should manifest prior to the age of 18, as intellectual disability is a developmental issue that does not arise suddenly in adulthood, with early signs potentially including delayed speech, slower acquisition of motor skills like sitting or walking, and challenges in social interactions or understanding emotions.

The phrase “Learners with Difficulty in Remembering or Concentrating” is utilized within the education field, especially in Special Education (SPED), to refer to students who have challenges with memory and focus. It is frequently employed by the Department of Education (DepEd) in the Philippines as part of inclusive education protocols, by SPED teachers and educational professionals during evaluations or classroom observations—particularly when a student tends to forget instructions, struggles to maintain attention, or is easily sidetracked—and by psychologists or school counselors as a descriptive label prior to a formal diagnosis, often in relation to issues like Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) or other learning challenges.

In education, while intellectual disability and memory issues may seem alike initially, they are essentially distinct; intellectual disability is a lifelong condition impacting a learner's overall cognitive and adaptive abilities, necessitating organized and prolonged educational assistance, whereas memory challenges primarily influence recall and focus and can often be addressed with specific classroom strategies and interventions. Understanding these differences assists educators in crafting suitable instruction, minimizing stigma, and ensuring learners obtain the necessary support for success

References:

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