Teaching the English Language to Slow Learners:
A Comprehensive Study

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Abstract – Slow learners are poor at achieving academic skills and are often ignored by teachers. Slow learners lag behind other students in academics and in the areas of social, emotional, and psychological well-being. The present study aims to find out the English language teachers' perspective on teaching the English language to slow learners and how far they feel the need to modify the present curriculum on the basis of learners' ability. To serve the desired purpose, 20 teachers working at the Faculty of Arts and Women's College, Department of English, Aligarh Muslim University, have been selected as study subjects. The researchers have used a five-point Likert scale to determine their perspectives. The findings aim to identify slow learners and help them critically evaluate their learning, gain confidence and develop strategies that facilitate them to overcome fear.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Many learners face challenges acquiring a language other than their mother tongue in today's diverse society. To enable learners to fully participate in both the academic and social aspects of school life, educators need to recognize how this phenomenon impacts teaching and learning and identify ways to support language development and language acquisition. Learners who are learning in a language other than their mother tongue will often have a wealth of knowledge in a language other than the classroom. However, these students will often not have been introduced to the vocabulary and concepts of the new language necessary for comprehending the content, and this kind of learner is called a 'slow learner'.

A "slow learner" is a term used to describe a student who has limited intellectual abilities to learn necessary academic skills, the one who takes more time to learn than their peers. However, the distinction should be made between slow learning and other learning processes, learners, especially the mentally challenged ones (the latter being also called "backwards", "underachiever", "learning disabled", "educationally subnormal", and the like), based on their rate of learning. By no means should a slow learner be equated with a mentally challenged because the former can achieve a reasonable degree of academic success even though at a slower rate than an average student. As an adult, a slow learner usually becomes self-supporting, independent and socially adjusted. Nevertheless, they adapt themselves to regular classroom programs at an early stage, which fits in with his slow learning ability.

Among the various factors, the following are some of the prime inhibiting factors attributed widely to the poor performance of slow learners; such as low self-esteem, lack of goal-setting and problem-solving skills, poor memorizing abilities, lack of achievement motivation, emotional disturbances, poor peer relationship, lack of parental support etc.

II. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

English is being treated as a world language and is known as the global language because of its vast presence and demand worldwide. Years of school study do not make learners master English. English is not taught properly in schools. As most learners hail from rural areas, the bilingual method is adopted in language classes. This method is only helpful for slow learners to an extent.

Moreover, this act reduces the actual language learning process. Learning and acquiring English needs constant practice and patience. Slow learners need special attention and care to be duly helped in getting rid of their inferiority in learning and educational achievement. Teachers can do much to help such students. By understanding their students' strengths and weaknesses, incorporating a variety of teaching styles and motivating students to learn, teachers are best able to help them reach their goal of becoming competent and productive communicators in English. They can improve their teaching methods, the tasks they assign to their students, and how they assess their work. As long as they continue trying new ways to assist these children, they will be able to make progress and overcome the fear of language learning.

Therefore, this study is of great relevance and attempts to make a modest contribution to the growing knowledge in the field of self-directed learning of English. It may also be pointed out that the present study is significant for the following reasons:

(1) It is the first scientific study of its kind, investigating the state of ELT in the Indian context with particular reference to the use of learning strategies adopted by students at the university level.

(2) It attempts to present a model of self-instruction based on some of the major studies that have been carried out so far on learning strategies, learner-training and self-directed learning of English.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1.1 Participants

The participants in the present study are 20 teachers working at the Faculty of Arts and Women's College, department of English, Aligarh Muslim University located in Aligarh, UP, India. They are teaching English to both undergraduate and postgraduate students.

1.2 Instrument and Tool

A questionnaire is administered to the teachers of English to gain the quantitative data. It contains 20 statements which are intended to identify the perspective of the teachers of English about teaching English to slow learners. The researchers have used a five-point Likert scale to determine the extent of agreement or disagreement of the selected subjects with each mentioned statement. The questionnaire was selected as the data collection instrument because it is easy to analyze.

1.3 Data interpretation and analysis

The collected data has been analyzed using the statistical software SPSS 16. The descriptive graphs and percentages are used to present the Participants' perceptions.

IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This part deals with the findings of the questionnaire. The study's outcome was indeed a revelation to identify and teach the English Language to slow learners. The following graphs show the obtained results of each statement:

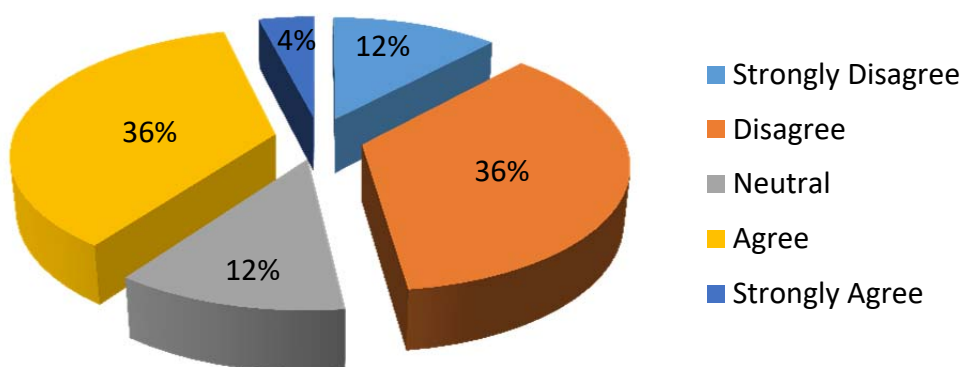1.1 Teaching the English language to slow learners is difficult**.**

Figure No. 01

About 36% of the teachers disagree that teaching language to slow learners is difficult. While other, 36% of the teachers agree with the statement that it is difficult to teach language to slow learners. And 12% of the teachers strongly disagree that it is not difficult to teach language to slow learners, while the other 12% of the teachers remain neutral in their answers. The remaining 4% of the teachers strongly agreed with the statement.

1.2 Slow learners are able to analyze the language by using language techniques and other activities.
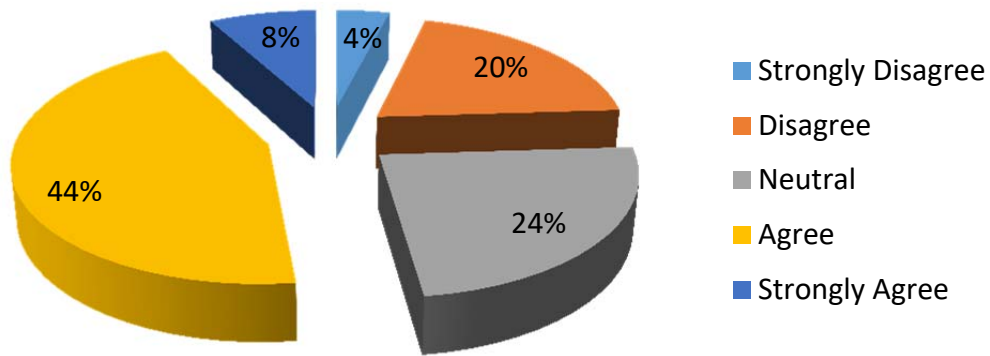
Figure No. 2

Around 44% of the teachers agreed that slow learners are able to analyze the language by using techniques and other activities, while 4% of the teachers were not in favour of the teachers remained neutral, and 20% of the teachers disagreed with the statement. The remaining 8% of the teachers strongly agreed.

Hence, slow learners can analyze the language by using techniques and other activities. Thus, they understand the purpose of the activities and techniques used to teach them English.

1.3 Slow learners are often rebellious, aggressive and hypercritical.
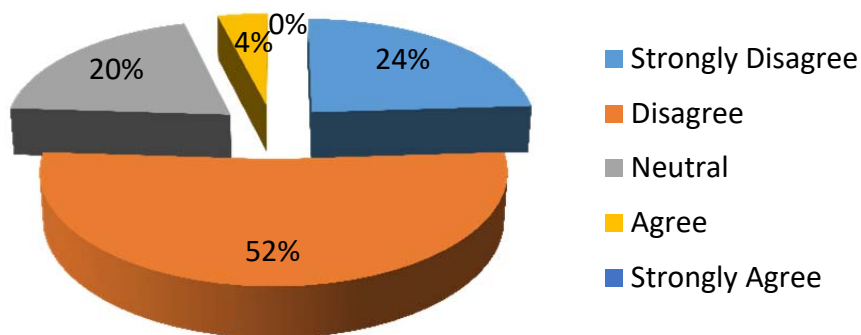
Figure No.3

52% of the teachers disagreed that slow learners are rebellious, aggressive and hypercritical, while 4% of the teachers agreed with this statement. 24% of the teachers strongly disagree, and the remaining 20% remain neutral in their answers. Thus, slow learners are not rebellious, aggressive and hypercritical.

1.4 I should not correct the grammatical mistake continually.
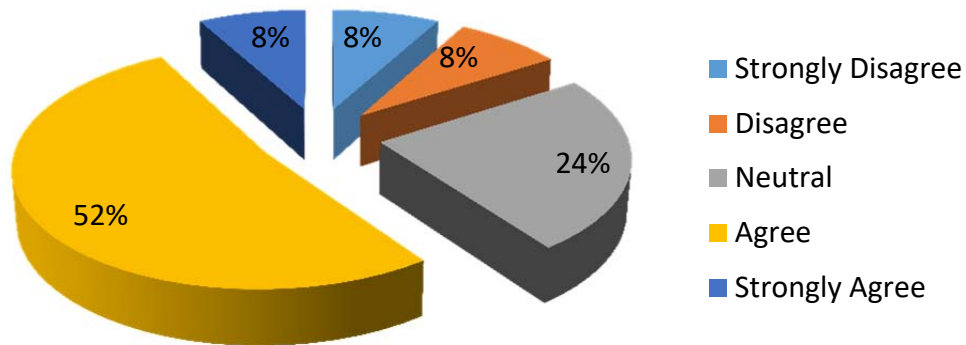
Figure No. 4

Around 52% of the teachers agreed that grammatical mistakes should not be corrected continually, while 8% of the teachers disagreed with the statement and other 8% of the teachers strongly agreed with the statement. 24% of the teachers were neutral in their answer as they think it is sometimes necessary to correct their grammatical mistakes; the left 8% of the teachers strongly disagreed with the statement. Therefore, teachers should not correct grammatical mistakes continually.

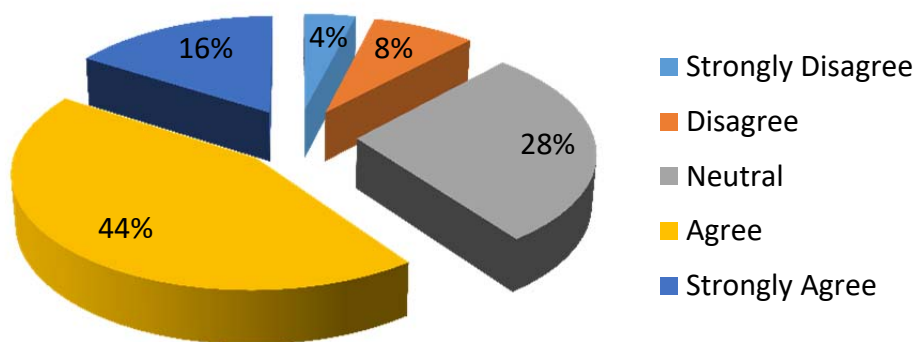1.5 I must use feedback from their home and peers to improve on their work.

Figure No.5

44% of the teachers agree with the statement that it is useful to take feedback from home and peers as it improves their work. 28% of the teachers are neutral in their answer, while 16% of the teachers strongly agree with this statement. 8% of the teachers disagree, and the remaining 4% of the teachers strongly disagree. Therefore, it is very useful to use feedback from home and peers to enhance their performance and improve their work.

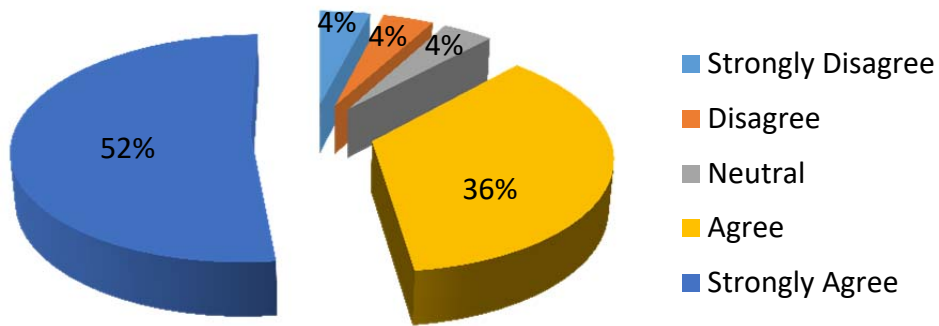1.6 I should be friendly and supportive toward the slow learners.

Figure No. 6

About 52% of the teachers strongly agree with the statement that they should be friendly and supportive towards the slow learners, while 36% of the teachers agree with this statement; thus, 100% of teachers agree with the statement that friendliness and being supportive is helpful for the slow learners as they get encouraged and motivated. 4% of the teachers strongly disagree and are not sure of their answer.

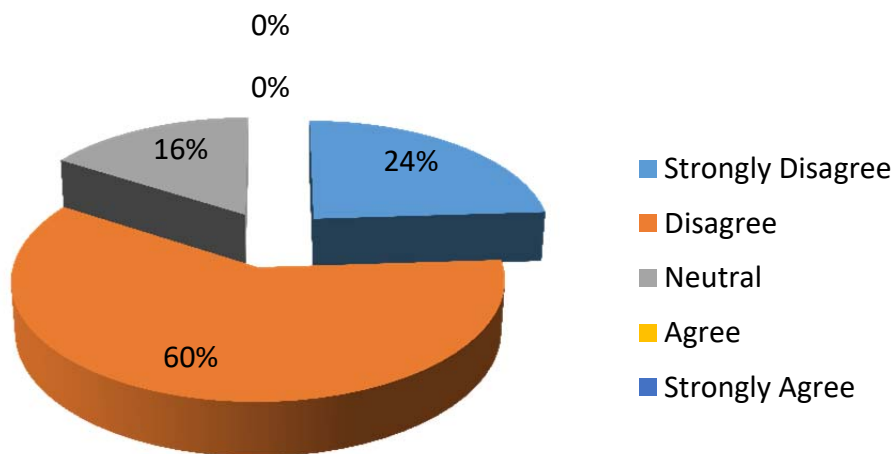1.7 slow learners are to be considered non-academic.

Figure No.7

It can be seen in the above graphic representation that 100% of the teachers disagree with the statement as they do not consider slow learners as non-academic. While 24% of the teachers strongly disagree with the statement that is, slow learners are to be considered academic.
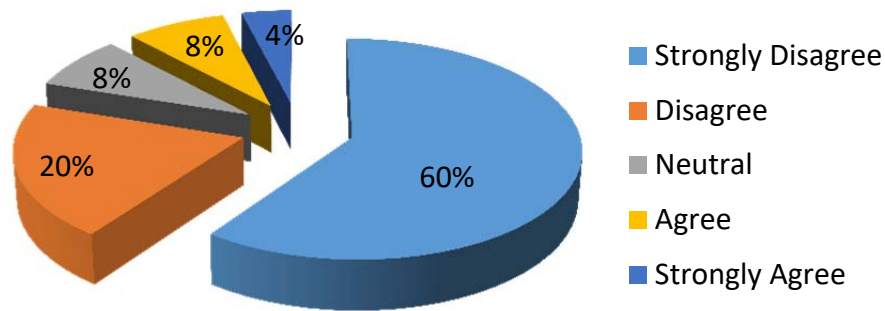
1.8 I should be biased towards slow learners.

Figure No. 8

The majority of the teachers strongly disagree with being biased towards slow learners. 20% of the teachers disagree with the statement. Only 8% of the teachers agree, and 4% of the teachers strongly agree.

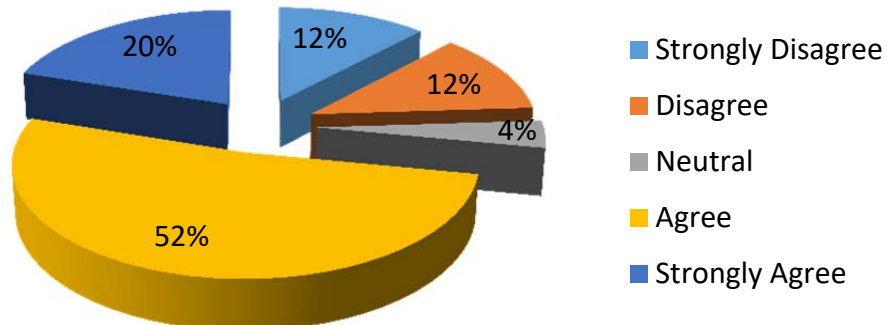1.9 Syllabus should be designed by keeping slow learners and average learners in mind.

Figure No.9

52% of the teachers agreed that the syllabus should be designed by keeping slow learners and average learners in mind. 20% of the teachers agree, while 12% of the teachers disagree and strongly disagree with this statement. Therefore syllabus should be designed by keeping all levels of learners in mind.

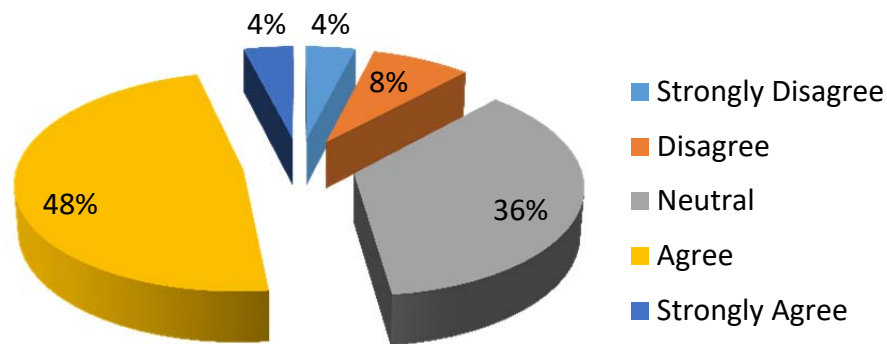1.10 slow learners can do much more than bright learners.

Figure No. 10

48% of the teachers agreed that slow learners could do much more than bright learners, while 8% of the teachers disagreed with this statement. 4% of the teacher disagree and strongly disagree with this. Therefore, it shows that slow learners have the capability and ability to do much more than bright learners.

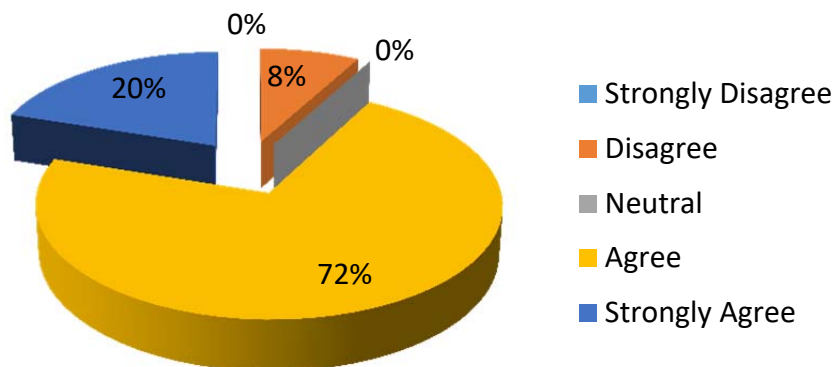1.11 I believe that motivating and testing students increases their ability.

Figure No. 11

72% of the teachers agree that motivating and testing increase the ability of the slow learner, while 20% of the teachers strongly agree with this statement. 8% of the teachers disagree. Thus, the above result proves that motivation and testing should be done to increase the ability of the slow learner.

1.12 I think using technology in learning a language is necessary.
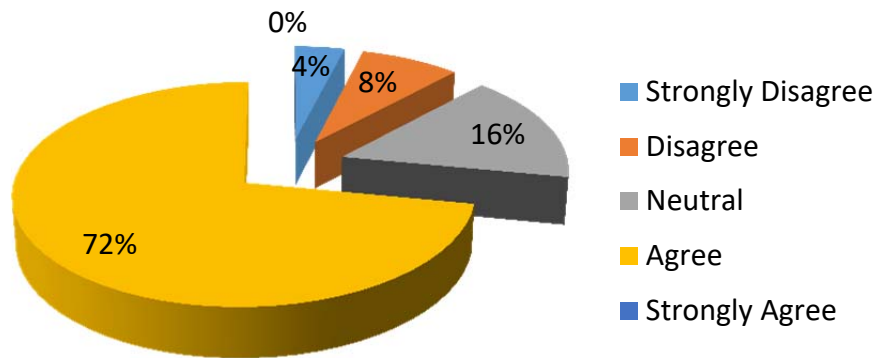
Figure No.12

Around 72% of the teachers agree that technology in learning a language is necessary, while only 8% of the teachers disagree with this statement, and 4% of the teachers strongly disagree with it. Hence, the use of technology is highly recommended and effective for learning a language.

1.13 I prefer using different techniques to motivate slow learners.

Figure No.13

84% of the teachers agree that using techniques to motivate slow learners are helpful in classrooms, while 4% of the teachers strongly agree and 8% of the teachers strongly disagree. Thus, from the above result, it is clear that the use of different techniques motivates slow learners.

1.14 Classroom activities help struggling students experience success.
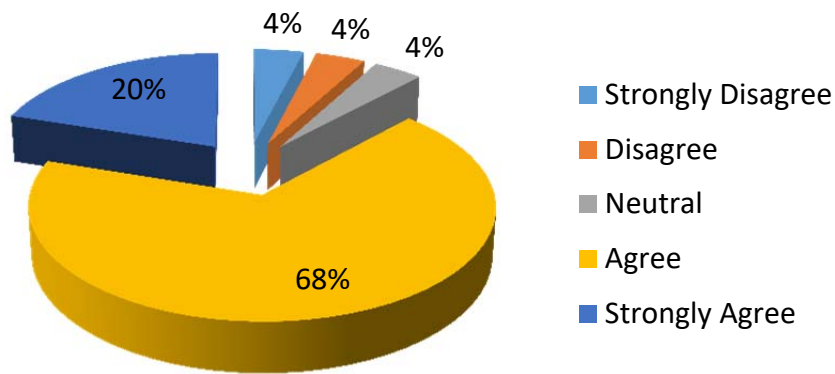
Figure No.14

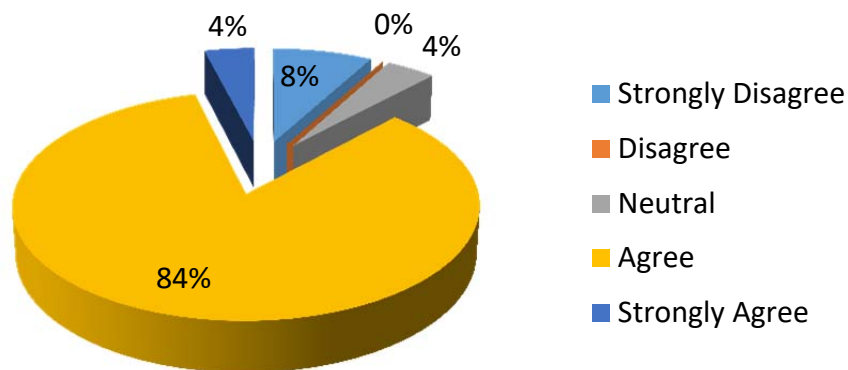68% of the teachers agree that classroom activities do help struggling students experience success, while 4% of the teachers disagree, strongly disagree and think neutral. 20% of the teachers strongly agree. Hence, it is clear from the result that classroom activities should be used regularly to help them achieve success.

1.15 Individualizing instructions for students is very effective.
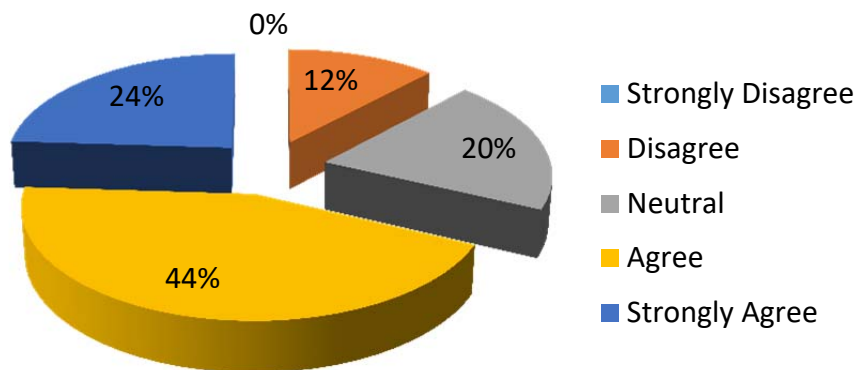
Figure No.15

44% of the teacher agreed that individualizing instructions for students are very effective, while 24% of the teachers strongly agree with this statement.12% of the teachers disagree, and 20% of the teachers think neutral. Therefore, individualizing instructions for students is very effective and helpful for the learner.

1.16 Teaching materials should be concrete and simple.
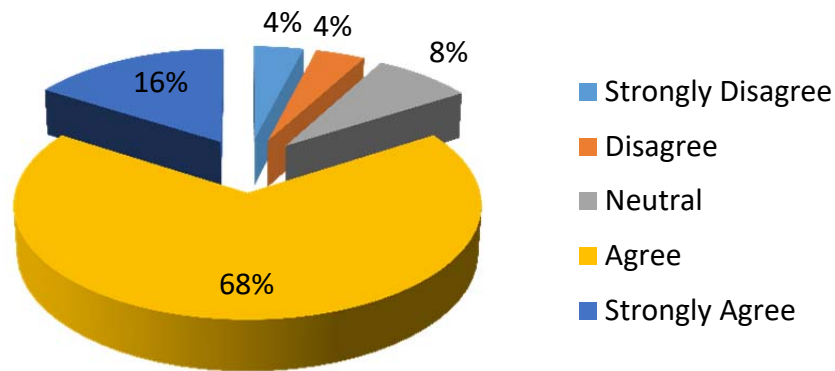
Figure No.17

About 68% of the teachers agreed that teaching material should be concrete and simple as it is for slow learners so that they can learn easily. 16% of the teachers strongly agree with the statement, while 4% of the teachers disagree and strongly disagree.

1.17 Slow learners create disturbance in the classrooms.
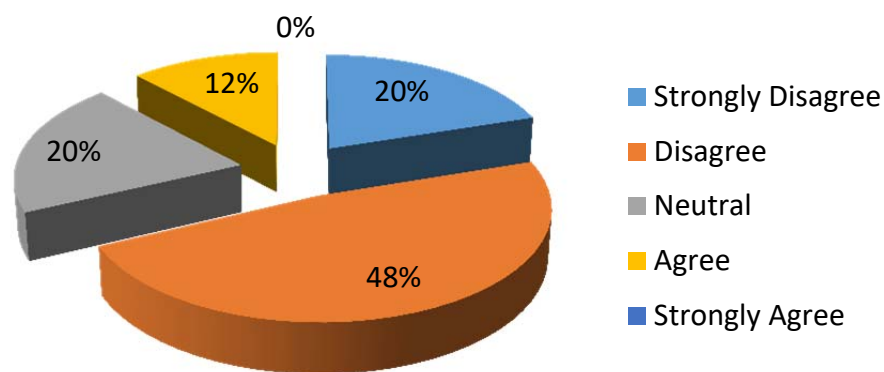
Figure No.17

48% of teachers disagree that slow learners create disturbance in the classroom. 20% of the teachers strongly disagree with this statement, while 12% of teachers agree with this statement. Thus, slow learners do not create a disturbance.

1.18 Positive attitude of teachers enhance the performance of slow learners.
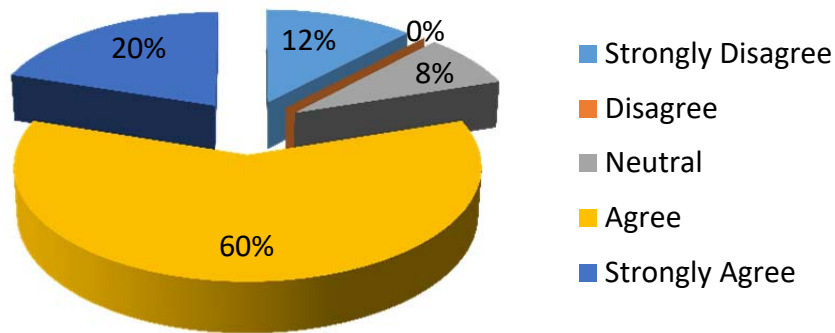
Figure No. 18

60% of the teachers agree that a positive attitude the teacher enhances the performance of the slow learner, while 12% of the teachers strongly disagree with the statement. 20% of the teachers strongly agree, and 8% of the teachers have a neutral answer. Therefore, teachers should have a positive attitude toward the slow learner.

1.19 Activities should be designed by keeping slow learners in mind.
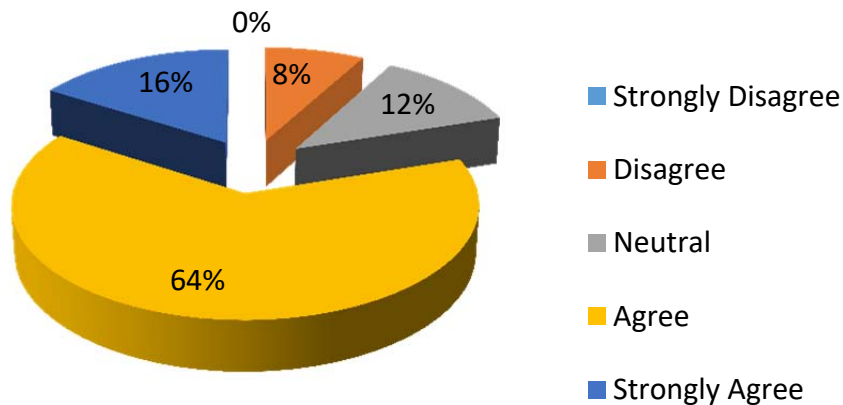
Figure No. 19

Around 64% of the teachers agree that activities should be designed to keep slow learners in mind, while 8% disagree. 16% of the teachers strongly agree with the statement. Therefore, the result shows that activities should be designed keeping slow learners in mind so that slow learners do not find it difficult to cope.

1.20 I prefer encouraging slow learners to raise their confidence and perform better.
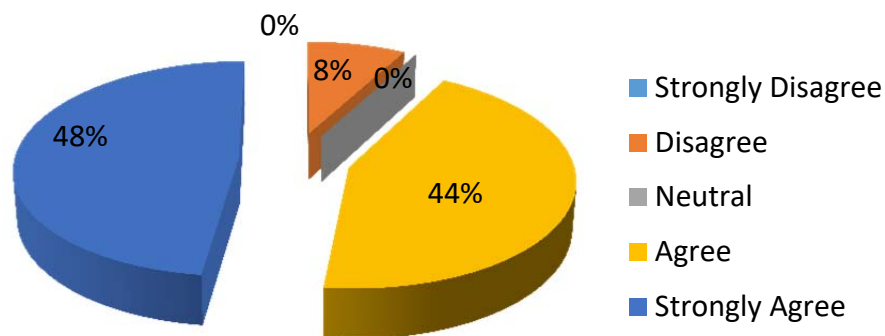
Figure No.20

48% of the teachers strongly agree with the statement that they highly prefer encouraging slow learners to discouraging them. 44% of the teachers agree with the statement, whereas 8% of the teachers disagree with the statement.

Hence, it is clear from the result that encouragement brings motivation and success to the slow learners than discouraging them.

The survey was helpful in creating awareness about the difficulties faced by the slow learners and in distinguishing slow learners from normal learners.

V. CONCLUSION

All students long to be successful. Therefore, teachers should do their best to facilitate them to succeed. Teachers should provide ways to help them achieve their academic goals. Slow learners need special attention and care to be duly helped in getting rid of their inferiority in learning and educational achievement. The following conclusions can be drawn from the responses to the questionnaire given to the teachers of Women's College at AMU:

1. The teachers gave a mixed response when it comes to difficulties faced by them while teaching English to slow learners. Therefore, efforts are needed to understand the reasons due to why a large number of teachers believe that it is difficult to teach slow learners. According to the teachers, slow learners are aware of the activities and techniques which are aimed at improving their language. This fact provides insights into the mind of slow learners. If slow learners are conscious of the techniques and activities, it could be easily extrapolated that they can improve with a little bit of patience on the part of the learner.
2. As for the rebellious nature of the slow learners, teachers are of the opinion that such learners are not aggressive. The response of the teachers could further be used to surmise that slow learners usually become introverts by nature. As a consequence, teachers believe that grammatical mistakes should not be constantly corrected so that such students do not get interrupted if they wish to speak. Moreover, the constant interruption will adversely affect their fluency which will hamper the growth of slow learners.
3. The teachers are open and willing to accept the suggestions and recommendations from their peers and parents to improve their way of teaching slow learners. In addition to this, the teachers themselves believed that a teacher should be friendly and supportive towards the slow learners as it will boost their confidence which in turn will help them grow. The remarkable point to be noted is that the teachers do not perceive slow learners as non-academic. In their view, teachers believe that slow learners could fit into the mainstream possibly with the help of some alternative ways in which they could be taught. In addition to this, teachers at Women's College are of the perception that there must not be any bias when it comes to slow learners.

4. The teachers at Women's College also believe that the syllabus should also be designed keeping in mind the slow and average learners so that it meets the requirement of all the learners equally. Nearly 50% of the teachers believe that slow learners can do better than bright learners; however, the remaining percentage of teachers have a mixed response. Moreover, a sizeable chunk of the teachers in the sample shows that motivation and testing increase the learning ability of slow learners. Interestingly, the same percentage of teachers believe that using technology is essential in learning a language.

5. A huge percentage of teachers prefer using different techniques to motivate slow learners which is indicative of the fact that the present techniques being used by the teachers are not as per the requirements of slow learners. Hence, they employ their individual techniques to teach slow learners which indicates that creativity is required on the part of the teacher to tackle the problems associated with such learners. In addition to this, the majority of the teachers believe that individualized instructions for such students can be very effective.

6. The majority of the teachers from Women's College do not consider slow learners as disturbing elements which means that teachers consider such learners to be a part of the class and not an isolated bunch. The teachers also understand fully well the importance of teachers' positive attitude in enhancing the performance of slow learners. Besides this, they also understand the importance of designing the classroom activities according to the needs of slow learners. Moreover, the teachers strongly believe that encouraging slow learners raises their confidence and helps them in performing better.

VI. SUGGESTIONS

Teachers should understand the strengths and weaknesses of the learners. Motivation and improved teaching methods play a vital role in education. This study provides an insight into the English language teaching activity in classrooms. There must be an improvement in teaching effectiveness, and the methods of teaching should be changed and designed while keeping slow learners in mind. The teacher should select a suitable method of teaching according to the content. Teaching the English language to slow learners is not a difficult task for the teachers, which also resulted in the survey. Teachers' behaviour and support play an important role in enhancing the learning abilities and capabilities of slow learners. The teacher can and should motivate and encourage learners to achieve their goals, which results in success. Further study is required in revising the syllabi and other teaching materials, keeping in mind the needs of slow learners. The results raise some interesting points about the role of learners and teachers in the English classroom. Further research could be done considering the following points in mind: the context in which national and universities' policies create a supportive environment; the curriculum together with learning materials and learning activities designed with teachers' and students' contributions; the qualified and experienced teachers who were confident in performing their roles in accordance with the learner-centred approach perspectives; and the learners' awareness of their roles in the language learning process.

There is a need to increase the time allocated for English teaching to develop students' skills in listening, speaking, reading, and writing, which was seen in the result. It is clear that slow learners require more attention in contrast to those who are born with a knack for language learning. Teaching slow learners is a slow process at best, demanding great patience and unlimited enthusiasm. It must be kept in mind, however, that slow learners are not stupid; they are simply slow youngsters frustrated by repeated failure. They are pathetically in need of a patient, sympathetic, enthusiastic, imaginative teacher. They may try his patience unbearably, but his success with them, however small, will be a joy forever.

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APPENDIX

Dear respondent:

I am conducting a survey on English Language Teaching and Slow Learners, the key aspect pertaining to overcoming the problems faced by the slow learners and using a different process for achieving it through a certain theoretical and conceptual framework.

Kindly fill up the questionnaire. Your identity will be kept confidential, and the information provided by you will be used for only academic purposes.

1. Name_____

2. Discipline formally qualified to teach_____

3. Mother tongue_____

4. Years spent in teaching_____

5. Bilingual   Multilingual

6. ESL   EFL   ENL

S.no		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1.	Teaching English language to slow learners is difficult.					
2.	Slow learners are able to analyze the language by using language techniques and other activities.					
3.	Slow learners are often rebellious, aggressive and hypercritical.					
4.	I should not correct the grammatical mistake continually.					
5.	I must use feedback from their home and peers to improve on their work.					
6.	I should be friendly and supportive towards slow learners.					
7.	Slow learners are to be considered as non-academic.					
8.	I should be biased towards slow learners.					
9.	Syllabus should be designed by keeping slow learners and average learners in mind.					
10.	Slow learners can do much more than a bright learner.					

11.	I believe that motivating students and testing increases their ability.					
12.	I think using technology in learning language Is necessary.					
13.	I prefer using different techniques to motivate slow learners.					
14.	Classroom activities help struggling students experience success.					
15.	Individualizing instructions for students is very effective.					
16.	Teaching materials should be concrete and simple.					
17.	Slow learners create disturbance in the classrooms.					
18.	Positive teacher's attitude enhances performance.					
19.	Activities should be designed by keeping slow learners in mind.					
20.	I prefer encouraging the slow learners than Discouraging them.					