

Facilitating individuals with specific learning disorders in Sri Lanka and Czech Republic

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ABSTRACT

Individuals with specific learning disorders often leave school with fewer qualifications and mostly become unemployed or economically inactive, if they are not sufficiently supported. In addition, they face numerous obstacles and challenges in their life due to their disability. Therefore, it is important to provide appropriate support to overcome their barriers in learning and to succeed in their lives. There is no sufficient expertise and services currently available in Sri Lanka to support individuals with specific learning disabilities effectively. Efforts to support the education of individuals with specific learning disabilities are underlined in the Czech Education Act and it can be identified that there are many effective services and facilities available for students with learning disabilities in the Czech Republic, compared to Sri Lanka. Consequently, this review article attempts to examine the health and special educational facilities and supportive services provided for individuals with specific learning disorders in Czech Republic and Sri Lanka with the intention of providing many valid recommendations for Sri Lanka to develop and improve the healthcare and special education systems for individuals with learning disabilities.

Keywords: *Czech Republic, Sri Lanka, Specific learning disabilities/disorders, Special education*

What are Specific Learning Disorders/Disabilities?

If a student struggles to read, write, spell, or learn math, although he/she does not have intellectual disabilities, emotional problems, or educational disadvantages and has normal vision, hearing, and language capabilities, the student may be suffering from a learning disability, however there is no fully agreed-upon definition for this term yet (Wolfork,2016).

According to the definition used in Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in United States, a Specific learning disability is: “a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or using language, spoken or written, that

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may manifest itself in imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculation” (Wolfork,2016, p.166).

Specific learning disorder is also stated as specific learning disability or learning disorder (American Psychiatric Association, 2018). This is a neurodevelopmental disorder with a biological origin. Genetic and/or neurobiological factors alter brain functioning in a way that affects one or more cognitive processes related to learning. These processing problems interrupt individuals’ basic skills of learning such as reading, writing and/or math. They can also interfere with higher mental skills such as organization, time planning, abstract reasoning, long or short term memory and attention. Even though the factors such as hearing and/or vision problems, socio-economic factors, cultural or linguistic differences, lack of motivation or ineffective teaching can multiply the challenges faced by these individuals, they are not the causes of specific learning disabilities (Learning Disabilities Association of America, 2013). Usually, the intelligence level of individuals with a learning disability is average or above average. It is important to understand that learning disabilities can negatively affect not only an individual’s academic performances, but also his/her relationships with family, friends and in the workplace (American Psychiatric Association, 2018).

There are three types of learning disorders: **Dyslexia**, **Dysgraphia**, and **Dyscalculia**. **Dyslexia** is also termed as *specific learning disorder with impairment in reading* (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Dyslexia is characterized by difficulties with spelling, decoding, and accurate/fluent word identification. It negatively affects an individual’s vocabulary growth and comprehension (Wadlington, Elliot & Kirylo, 2008). Individuals with **Dysgraphia** have difficulties with writing. Problems with writing can include difficulties with spelling, grammar, punctuation, and handwriting. Specific learning disorder with impairment in written expression is an alternative term to refer this disorder. **Dyscalculia** is characterized by difficulties with number sense, memorizing math facts, math calculations, math reasoning and math problem solving. This is also named as specific learning disorder with impairment in mathematics (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

Prevalence of Specific Learning Disorders/Disabilities

It has been found out that the prevalence of specific learning disorders (SLD) among school-age children across different languages and cultures around the world is 5%-15% (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). According to the statistics of Eurostat (2015),7.6% of individuals in Czech Republic are reported to have a disability. The prevalence rates of specific learning disorders in Czech Republic is 5%–8% and dyslexia is the most reported specific learning disorder in the country (Caravolas, Mikulajová, & Kucharská, 2019). The authors could not find the exact prevalence statistics of specific learning disabilities in Sri Lanka, even though, could find some articles which reported specific learning disabilities are highly prevalent among Sri Lankan school students (e.g. UNICEF, 2016; Jayawardana, Thabrew, Madushani, 2016). According to the estimates of the Department of Census and Statistics (2012), nearly 9% of the age 5 and above population in Sri Lanka have a disability and 21% of the disabled individuals reported a cognitive disability.

Facilitating Individuals with Specific Learning Disorders/Disabilities

If students with learning disorders did not receive sufficient support from educators for learning, they can quickly fall into a spiral of failure with confusion and frustration (British Dyslexia Association, 2005). Children with learning disabilities face complicated challenges

and difficulties due to their disability during their childhood and those can negatively affect their emerging self-concept. Hence, some children with learning disorders can become harsh self-critics. Such children have an increased lifelong risk for developing a broad range of psychiatric disorders, especially depressive disorders and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (McNulty, 2003; National Guideline Alliance (UK,2016). Many research studies have revealed that compared to other students, college students with specific learning disabilities were found to be nearly three times more likely to have depressive illness, and have more problems with their grades and quality of their coping skills (Lange & Thompson,2006). In addition, it has been found out that adults with learning disabilities are more likely to experience unemployment, or underemployment, and to earn less than adults without learning disorders. (Madaus, 2008; Learning Disabilities Association of America, 2013). Consequently, early identification of learning disabilities and applying effective psychosocial and special educational interventions to facilitate such students are significant to prevent creating persistent and adverse consequences in their lives (Lange & Thompson,2006).

Identifying, Diagnosing and Facilitating Individuals with Specific Learning Disorders in Czech Republic

Culturally validated screening and diagnostic tools are being used to identify individuals with specific learning disorders. The Czech government has recognized the positive outcomes of early identification and intervention for children with learning disorders. Therefore, the Czech government has enacted an intervention framework to screen and monitor children's literacy development from late kindergarten/early first grade and to provide extra learning support from school for those who at risk, including speech therapy services if required (Caravolas, Mikulajová, & Kucharská, 2019). Language-sensitive and code-sensitive skills assessments, that consist of the measures of phoneme awareness, naming speed, reading fluency, and orthographic knowledge, are used with preschoolers, primary-school-aged population and post-secondary-school populations. These new Czech models of early detection and intervention are similar to those used in the UK, and the USA. (Caravolas, Mikulajová & Kucharská, 2019) The class teacher can carry out an educational assessment with children who are suspected to have a specific learning disability to identify whether they show difficulties in following areas:

- “Reading: the level of reading speed, errors made, level of understanding, general reading behavior.
- Writing - handwriting: fine-motor difficulty (how the child holds the pen or pencil), ability to visualize letters and ability to remember the motor patterns of letter forms
- Writing - spelling: most common mistakes
- Mathematics: the child's ability to understand simple number concepts and learn number facts and procedures; whether they can align numbers into proper columns, perform written calculations, and retrieve numerical facts (e.g. multiplication tables)
- Focus: the child's ability to maintain focus and concentration
- Auditory perception: ability to divide words into syllables, ability to recognize the first sounds of a word, word retrieval (verbal confidence and fluency), comprehend words in a song, recognize when a sound changes, etc.
- Visual perception: possible difficulties in discrimination of figures, ability to distinguish an object from irrelevant background information, ability of the child to be aware of the distinctive features of forms including shape, orientation, size, and colour

Facilitating individuals with specific learning disorders in Sri Lanka and Czech Republic

- Speech: richness of vocabulary, ability to find suitable expressions, specific speech disorders
- Ability to reproduce rhythm
- Abilities relating to space and orientation
- Ability to recognize left and right
- Child's ability/attitude when working in a team
- Family environment, general level and type of education, child care, parents' values regarding the education and care of their children." (Cappa & Giulivi, 2012, P.9-10)

Formal diagnosis for specific learning disorders is carried out during the mid-primary school years (approximately the second grade), once children have demonstrated significant delays in literacy, despite adequate support and intervention. The diagnosis is usually carried out by educational psychologists and special teachers/educators who are members of a pedagogical and a counseling center or of a special education center on the basis of an IQ-literacy attainment discrepancy (Caravolas, Mikulajová, & Kucharská, 2019). However, Pupil assessment can be done only with parental approval (Cappa & Giulivi, 2012).

Multi-disciplinary teams in pedagogical and psychological counselling centres provide counselling and guidance support. These teams include psychologists, special education teachers, speech therapists and social workers. They collaboratively work with professionals from other sectors, such as medical doctors and family/child social care professionals in the area. In addition, having a close collaboration with parents and class teachers is imperative for these teams (European Agency for Special needs and Inclusive education, n.d.).

Education Facilitates Provided by the Czech Government to Facilitate Individuals with Specific Learning Disorders/Disabilities

The right of all children to be educated is ensured in the Czech constitution (Constitution of the Czech Republic No. 1/1993). Consequently, everybody has an equal opportunity to receive education, and education is compulsory and free for the age group of 6 years to 15 years.

Educating individuals with specific learning disabilities is emphasized in section 16 of the education act (Education act, Czech Republic, 2004). It has been updated several times. According to the act, students with specific learning disorders belong to the category of students with special educational needs and these students have the right to be provided with additional support provisions free of charge in order to have their education corresponding to their needs and possibilities. These include: providing adapted textbooks, specific teaching materials, support and counselling services, teaching assistants as means of support in school classrooms, and providing additional teaching in specific subjects. In addition, when students with learning disorders complete their education, sufficient conditions matching with their needs are specified. Moreover, the nature of their disability or difficulty is taken into consideration in evaluation procedures at schools. The form of the assessment is decided by the principal of the school with the agreement of the school council. The school principal can decide on the use of verbal assessment for a student with a developmental learning disorder based on a request of the student's legal guardian. Furthermore, in exceptional cases, the school director can extend the length of secondary and tertiary professional education maximum of two years for students with specific learning disabilities (Bartonova, 2015).

Facilitating individuals with specific learning disorders in Sri Lanka and Czech Republic

According to Decree no.72/2005 Coll., on the provision of counselling services in schools and school guidance facilities in the amendment to the decree no. 116/2011 Coll, school counselling facilities, and specialized counselling services are responsible for providing educational and psychological counselling services. Educational consultant, school prevention specialist, school psychologist, special education teacher, and occasionally, career counselor are in charge of providing educational and psychological counselling services at school. The specialized counselling services include pedagogical and psychological counselling centers, special education centers, and counseling centers.

In § 3 of the Decree no. 73/2005 Coll., in amendment no. 147/2011 Coll in the Czech Education Act explains forms of education for pupils with learning disorders. They are educated through the form of individual or group integration, or in a school established for students with specific learning disorders, or in a combination of all of these forms. A group of experts, including the head teacher, parents of the child and the counseling centers are responsible to decide the appropriate form of education for a student (European Agency for Special needs and Inclusive education, n.d.).

Under individual integration, a student with a Specific learning disorder will be educated in a regular/inclusive school environment, or in a school for students with other disabilities with an individual education plan. Usually, the average number of students in a regular mainstream class is 22.5, with no more than 30(European Agency for special needs and inclusive education, n.d.). Furthermore, the level of support to be provided for them is determined based on their individual education plans according to their individual traits. The principal of the school allows making an Individual Educational Plan (IEP) for a student with SLD after receiving a written recommendation from the school counseling department. The preparation of IEP is done with the cooperation of the workers in Pedagogical-Psychological counselling centers, school counselors, class teachers, teaching assistants, parents and the student. The school counseling facility evaluates the performance of the student and provides advisory support to everybody involved in the process twice a year (Bartoňová, Vitková & Vrabel, 2015). Furthermore, such students have an individual class for a short period of time every day (e.g. an hour a day) with a special education teacher. It has been found that this form is the most effective and students learn more through the interaction with peers in a regular school than in a "special class"(Bartoňová, 2015). At present, over 85% of pupils with learning disabilities study in the mainstream primary schools with special educational support and others study in special classes/schools (Bartoňová, 2015).

For students with specific learning disorders, group integration is accomplished by conducting "special classes" in regular schools. Especially, these classes are conducted for students with severe forms of learning disorders in primary schools. Those classes have a limited number of students and a special education teacher conducts the class (Bartonova, 2015). In addition, there is a possibility to educate students with specific learning disabilities in separate schools. These schools provide education for students whose special educational needs cannot be successfully met within the mainstream schools as well as for students whose parents prefer this placement. A team of experts provides education for students using a more special and an individual approach during the teaching process in these schools. In recent times, the role of special schools has been changing. Besides their usual educational role, they have turned into resource centers developing new educational methods and approaches and offering a wide range of advice and support services to students, their

Facilitating individuals with specific learning disorders in Sri Lanka and Czech Republic

parents and teachers in mainstream schools (European Agency for special needs and inclusive education, n.d.).

The students with learning disabilities learn the same curriculum as other students. The only difference is their teaching is done by a specially qualified staff creating favorable conditions for learning, using specific procedures and teaching methods and having close cooperation with counseling facilities (Bartonova, 2015). In addition, according to the nature of the disorder, they can use compensatory aids (for example, special course books, tablets, computers). Also, the symptoms of the student's specific learning difficulty are taken into consideration in his/her evaluation and classification (The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, 2016). Furthermore, there are specific teacher training programs for teachers on working with students with SEN and an additional pedagogical staff is available in every class (e.g. teacher's assistant, many teachers in a class). The head teacher of the school is responsible for appointing a suitable teacher's assistant by determining the required measure of his/her professional qualification (Bartonova, 2015).

Moreover, the bill of Ministry of Education emphasizes that the school counseling facility can do the modification of conditions on behalf of the students with specific learning disabilities to face the final exam at high school, such as providing longer time for completion of the tests, using a suitable font for the reader, possibility to work in a separate room during the exam, and use of a computer (Bartonova, 2015).

Support centers at universities for students with special needs (e.g. Masaryk University) provide advisory assistance for students with learning disorders. In addition, a number of non-governmental and public organizations, for example, Dyscentrum, Czech Society of Dyslexia, not only support students and adults with specific learning disorders but also they conduct seminars, lectures, and conferences aimed at raising awareness and deepening the knowledge about these disabilities among people (Literacy project, n.d.).

The special education system of Czech Republic has made tremendous progresses after implementing inclusive education there in 1989, even though, there is not a common agreement on the value of inclusive education yet. There are specific laws in the Czech Republic that protect the rights of individuals with disabilities to have access to education. Prior to the inclusive education movement in Czech Republic, individuals with learning disabilities had been excluded from the general population due to their disability. Present research studies have shown that stigma surrounding the disability in the Czech community has been largely reduced after introducing inclusive education and which has led to greater inclusiveness in the education system and the community (Florian, & Becirevic, 2011; Langer, 2017).

Teacher Education and Training to Facilitate Students with Specific Learning Disabilities in Czech Republic

The Act on Educational Staff (563/2004) explains the required qualifications of teachers to work with students with special needs. All university teacher training programs contain modules on the education of pupils with special education needs. It is mandatory to complete the five-year university master's program in special education for teachers who need to work as SEN counsellors and/or special education teachers for students with special needs in schools. (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, n.d) In addition, all teachers should participate in in-service training to acquire the skills to deal with the diversity and special needs of students to support inclusion. The counselling

Facilitating individuals with specific learning disorders in Sri Lanka and Czech Republic

and resource centres support mainstream school teachers to educate children with learning disorders by providing guidance and counselling services. Special education teachers from these counselling centres provide even direct support to students in mainstream settings, if necessary (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, n.d).

Screening and Diagnosing Individuals with Specific Learning Disorders in Sri Lanka

At the moment, there are no proper culturally validated screening and diagnostic tools to identify and diagnose individuals with specific learning disorders in Sri Lanka. Consequently, most children with learning disorders are not diagnosed at an early age because of the lack of awareness and knowledge on the subject across stakeholders in the fields of health, education and welfare. Parents particularly in rural areas are unaware of the child's exact condition as early medical consultations do not provide proper guidance. In addition, their Socio-economic restrictions constrain further investigations and the children of these families go undiagnosed till it is too late for interventions (UNICEF, 2016; Jayawardena & Abeyawickrama, 2016).

Education Facilitates Provided by the Sri Lankan Government to Facilitate Individuals with Specific Learning Disorders/Disabilities

The Constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka (1978) clearly emphasizes obtaining education is a fundamental right of every Sri Lankan citizen. "Free Education Act" was approved in Sri Lanka by the state council in 1945, and thereby education is state-funded and offered free of charge at all levels, including the university level.

Fundamental rights for individuals with disabilities are assured under the constitution of Sri Lanka, and under the Act for the Protection of Rights of Persons with Disabilities ratified in 1996. National disability-specific legislation was introduced under The Protection of Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act No. 28 of 1996 and this led to the formation of a National Council for Person with Disabilities (NCPD) addressing educational and vocational training, and the formation of institutions for accommodating people with disabilities (UNICEF, 2003 in Jayawardana & Abeyawikrama, 2016)

Sri Lanka embraced integrated education for children with special educational needs in 1968. Also, the Salamanca Convention of 1994 gave supplementary motivation to implement the concept of inclusion of children with special educational needs. The philosophy and practice of inclusive education were supported by educational reforms of 1997.

Currently, there are four educational options for pupils with disabilities in Sri Lanka: special schools, special units attached to mainstream schools, inclusive mainstream school settings, and special resource centers attached to mainstream schools offering additional support, particularly with literacy (Hettiarachchi & Das, 2014). In addition, students have the possibility to attend special schools run by non-governmental organizations and the private sector either by preference or because they cannot fit into either of the above-mentioned streams (Ministry of Social welfare, Sri Lanka, 2003). For example, Chithra Lane special school, Colombo 5 and Millennium Institute, Colombo, teach students with intellectual impairments and several other disabilities including specific learning disorders.

In 2003, the policy document, 'The New National Policies and Proposals for General Education' suggested that pupils who are 'differently-abled' and those having learning

Facilitating individuals with specific learning disorders in Sri Lanka and Czech Republic

difficulties should be provided with inclusive education. In order to attain this, they proposed as a minimum number of three primary and one secondary inclusive schools should be established in each divisional secretariat, with adequate infrastructure facilities, educational resources and teacher training. Unfortunately, this suggestion has not been accomplished yet (Ekanayake, Ariyaratna, Senevirathna, & Hettiarachchi, 2016).

No school psychologists are available in Sri Lankan schools as opposed to the developed countries. Therefore, at present, almost all schools are provided with a full-time counseling teacher (Ministry of Education, Sri Lanka, 2013). However, studies have shown that the quality of school counseling services is not in a satisfactory level. For example, the research conducted by Chathurika (2015) has shown that 65% of the students do not have much confidence in the school counselor, especially with individual counseling. Due to that reason, 52% of the students in her research are not satisfied with the current counseling services in their schools and with the location of the counselling room. Overcrowded classrooms without a teaching assistant, lack of sufficient knowledge and training on educating children with special needs and lack of physical resources in classrooms to provide lessons using modern teaching methods are some of the main difficulties faced by mainstream school teachers presently (Menikdiwela & Vojtova, 2017). This shows that the government still has not taken necessary steps to provide a proper education for students with special needs including learning disabilities by addressing their needs, even though the government has informed mainstream schools not to exclude children with special education needs from mainstream classrooms but to educate them with other students.

Policy makers face many barriers and challenges, when implementing disability-specific policy due to lack of skilled teachers and subject specific owners in the country (i.e. less than 10 qualified special education directors in the country), the support structures at the provincial and zonal level is weak, lack of appropriate infrastructure in schools, limited scope in curricula and the overall quality of education. Although the country's policies have circulated the concept of inclusive education, school principals and teachers still prioritize students' results at national examinations. Therefore, many children with Learning disabilities are deprived of having a proper school education. Discussions with education experts have revealed that a majority of regular schools are unwilling to admit Children with learning disabilities (Jayawardana & Abeyawikrama, 2016; UNICEF, 2016).

Most of the schools in Sri Lanka do not have the possibility to provide sufficient support for students with specific learning disorders and these are some of the least known disorders or in other words invisible disabilities in Sri Lanka. Children with learning disabilities have become a marginalized group in the society and there is also a stigma against educating them with other students (Jayawardana & Abeyawikrama, 2016).

Due to the lack of awareness of learning disorders and the negative attitude towards them, teachers misunderstand the students' weaknesses and needs. Therefore, teachers tend to punish and treat these students with improper support. As a consequence of this, these students experience frustration and tend to leave schools without reaching the expected standard of education (The Postgraduate Institute of Management: University of Sri Jayawardhanapura, 2016).

There are no sufficient special provisions provided for the education of children with SLD yet. For example, even though the policy says to provide students with learning disabilities extra time for examinations, mostly such students do not receive extra time due to not

Facilitating individuals with specific learning disorders in Sri Lanka and Czech Republic

having the diagnosis and the lack of awareness among teachers about this policy. Currently, such students are not provided with the opportunity to have more flexible and inclusive assessment procedures considering their special needs. (Muttiah, Drager & Connor, 2016). According to UNICEF South and East Asian Regional Report (2014), inadequate information on handicapped children is the main reason for this invisible status that regularly leads to the exclusion of these children from education.

Teacher Education and Training to Facilitate Students with Specific Learning Disabilities in Sri Lanka

“According to the Ministry of Education circular, there should be a trained special education teacher for every 5 students in a special unit (1:5 teacher-to-student ratio) and special education trained teachers are given 10 per cent incentive payment. To qualify for this benefit, special education teachers have to be registered at the Ministry of Education as a special education trained teacher, teaching for special needs students. For this, they need to either complete the Special Education course offered at National Colleges of Education or have over one year’s experience in the field coupled with a Ministry-recognized training” (Jayawardana & Abeyawikrama, 2016).

However, there are no well-structured pre-service and in-service education programs for teachers to raise awareness among them and to be trained on how to teach students with specific learning disorders. Even though the policy document, “The New National Policies and Proposals for General Education” presented in 2003 also suggested the need for upgrading current courses on special education to degree-level, including a six-month compulsory training module on children with special needs in order to raise awareness and promote positive attitudes towards inclusive education, regrettably, there are no significant changes that have happened yet (Ekanayake, Ariyaratna, Senevirathna, & Hettiarachchi, 2016). At present, the Open University of Sri Lanka offers a bachelor’s degree in Special Education and a postgraduate diploma in Special Needs Education and the NIE has a department dedicated to Special Education that offers a diploma in Special Needs Education and short and long-term teacher training programs in Special Education as well. (Ministry of Education, Sri Lanka, 2013; UNICEF, 2003). In addition to the fact that “There is one NCoE and a Teacher Training College where training of special education teachers is undertaken”(Ministry of Education, Sri Lanka, 2013, p.38). In addition, teacher training for inclusive education is also conducted by the National Institute of Education (Ministry of Social welfare, Sri Lanka, 2003). Currently, the number of specially trained teachers in Sri Lanka is 1250 (Ekanayake, Ariyaratna, Senevirathna, & Hettiarachchi, 2016). It is evident that only these few programs alone would not be sufficient to produce enough experts to support and educate children with special needs.

Recommendations for Sri Lanka

When considering the health and Special educational facilities provided for individuals with specific learning disorders in Czech Republic and Sri Lanka, it can be noticed that there are many effective services and facilities available for students with learning disorders in the Czech Republic, compared to Sri Lanka. Since the special education system of Czech Republic has made tremendous progress after implementing inclusive education and even present research studies have shown that stigma surrounding the disability in the Czech community has been largely reduced after introducing inclusive education to the country and which has led to greater inclusiveness in the education system and the community (Florian, & Becirevic, 2011; Langer, 2017), the authors believe some recommendations can be provided to Sri Lanka to develop and improve health and special educational facilities of

Facilitating individuals with specific learning disorders in Sri Lanka and Czech Republic

individuals with specific learning disorders by referring the health and special education systems in Czech republic.

Followings are the recommendations that the authors of this article provide to develop and improve health and special educational facilities to support for individuals with specific learning disabilities in Sri Lanka.

- Developing culturally validated standardized screening and diagnostic tools for specific learning disorders targeting children and adults' population in Sri Lanka. This tool must be developed in Sinhala, Tamil and English languages.
- Establishing effective and well-structured school psychological counselling services to screen and provide support for students with learning disorders and their families. Under which, establishing proper school counselling units at each school and establishing zonal school counseling centers in each education zone with properly trained and qualified psychologists, special education experts and counsellors to make aware and guide parents and teachers to identify and address the needs of children with special needs, are mandatory steps to be taken. These centers can provide the services in cooperation with the Ministry of Health, Social Services and the Ministry of Education.
- Conducting well-structured pre-service and in-service teacher training programs for school counselors, special education teachers and all the mainstream school teachers on how to identify, support and teach students with specific learning disabilities. Since Sri Lankan schools still do not have school psychologists like in developed countries, our school counselors and special education teachers must be provided with proper knowledge and training in order to provide sufficient psychological and educational guidance for such children and their parents to overcome their learning and behavioural difficulties. Even though all the teachers do not have more time to spend with each child due to having more students in one classroom and larger syllabuses to be covered, if the school counselors and special education teachers are provided with proper education and training on teaching students with learning disabilities, they can spend more time with each child to support them by using most appropriate intervention strategies and help other teachers to develop individual education plans and behavioral plans to educate such students effectively. Therefore, universities, colleges of education and teachers' training colleges must develop more teacher education programs such as degree programs, diplomas, certificate courses in Special Education, Educational Psychology, Child Psychology, Counseling Psychology, and Inclusive Education.
- Appoint at least one qualified and properly trained special education teacher to each mainstream school to support children with special needs and other teachers.
- Given the current economic and social situation of the country, we have to accept that it is not an easy task for the Sri Lankan government to immediately transform all the mainstream classrooms into inclusive classrooms. It may take many years. Until it happens gradually, it might be really effective if all the schools can conduct an individual class at least for a short time period every day for students with specific learning disabilities to support their learning and overcome behavioral issues under the guidance of a qualified and a trained school counselor and a special education teacher.
- School classrooms must be modernized by providing adequate physical resources, special textbooks, technology facilities, special equipment and tools so that teachers can teach students effectively using a variety of effective education methods by addressing their special educational needs.
- Teachers must be properly trained to explore new and practical teaching methods to educate students considering their needs instead of following ineffective traditional

Facilitating individuals with specific learning disorders in Sri Lanka and Czech Republic

teaching methods (e.g. multi-sensory approaches, more opportunities to learn through experiences and experiments).

- A more inclusive and up-to-date school curriculum must be developed through pilot testing and teachers must be properly trained on differentiating the syllabus according to students' special needs.
- Provide sufficient support (awareness, information, psychosocial support) to parents of children with specific learning disorders.
- Introduce more flexible assessment procedures and special provisions for state exams by considering the special needs of students. (e.g. the possibility to use a computer, conducting oral exams, and a possibility to work in a separate or non-distracting room.)
- More research studies should be carried out on learning disorders in order to find more effective ways to support their personal, educational and professional development. (e.g. prevalence of Dyslexia, Dysgraphia and dyscalculia in Sri Lanka; more common linguistic errors or mistakes done by Sinhalese and Tamil Dyslexic individuals and effective ways to prepare and conduct individual education plans and behavioral plans for students with learning disabilities in an overcrowded classroom)
- Support centers for individuals with special needs must be established in every university and divisional secretariat office. A well-trained professional staff must be appointed for these centers including special educators, psychologists, speech therapists, career guides and other relevant qualified professionals to offer psychological counseling, career guidance services and vocational training programs for individuals with special needs in all age groups. This might be really helpful for them to overcome their life challenges and lead a satisfactory life. Furthermore, these centers should take over the leadership to conduct public awareness programs, especially for parents and teachers on learning disabilities by focusing on its identification, etiology, prevalence and how to support such individuals to lead a normal life. Through this, negative social stigma and misunderstandings on learning disabilities can be eliminated effectively.

CONCLUSION

Specific learning disorders affect individuals' ability to read, write, and learn math. The main aim of this article was to provide some valid recommendations for Sri Lanka to develop and improve health and special educational facilities on behalf of individuals with learning disorders by getting inspiration from the Czech Republic. Because, there are many effective services and facilities available for students with learning disorders in the Czech Republic by achieving a great progress recently in supporting individuals with special needs, compared to Sri Lanka. The need of developing standardized and culturally validated screening and diagnostic tools for each specific learning disorder; establishing effective and well-structured school counselling services; establishing supportive centers for individuals with learning disabilities in universities and divisional secretariats; raising public awareness on learning disorders to eliminate negative social stigma and to support them to lead a successful life; conducting well-structured pre-service and in-service teacher training programs on supporting students with SLD; conducting more research studies on SLD in Sri Lanka to get an in-depth analysis on the issues faced by such individuals and find effective ways to support them; providing sufficient facilities and introducing flexible assessment procedures to mainstream schools so that teachers can provide a proper education for such students, are the main suggestions that the authors provide Sri Lanka to improve health and educational facilities and supportive services for individuals with specific learning disorders.

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Conflict of Interest

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