

Session topic: “When a Learner Walks away!!” – A Reflective Session on Supporting Struggling Learners

Date and time: 30 January 2026, from 3.30 PM to 4.30 PM

Venue: at the 3rd Floor Lecture Hall

The Medical Education Unit (MEU), JIPMER Karaikal, successfully conducted an interactive and reflective faculty development session. The session commenced with a warm welcome address by Dr Divyashanthi, setting the tone for reflective engagement and collaborative discussion. The session was attended faculty members from pre-clinical, para-clinical, and clinical departments, reflecting strong faculty engagement and interest in learner-centred educational practices.

Resource Persons

1. Dr Niraimathi – Session Lead
2. Dr Dinesh Kumar N – Co-Presenter
3. Dr Vijay Kishan – Moderator

Session Overview

The session focused on early identification and supportive strategies for struggling learners, moving away from deficit-based labels toward process-based, remediable, and humane educational approaches. The session began with an innovative set induction, where participants were invited to identify a deliberately placed spelling error in the session invite. This activity was intentionally designed to highlight the concept of missing abnormality within apparent normalcy, setting the tone for early identification of struggling learners.

This was followed by the use of the recent “nihilistic penguin” visual metaphor, which served as a powerful narrative device to illustrate learners who appear to “walk away” from the group, prompting reflection on whether such learners are disengaged or simply learning differently.

Interactive Engagement

Faculty participation was encouraged through Slido-based interactive polls, which elicited diverse perspectives on:

- Defining a “struggling learner”
- Recognising early academic and behavioural signals
- Faculty perceptions of learner difficulties among Gen Z students

These polls provided real-time insights into faculty understanding and helped challenge traditional trait-based labels.

Scholarly Inputs and Group Activities

Dr Vijay Kishan shared insights from his scholarly work on challenges faced by first-year medical students during teaching–learning activities, emphasizing the importance of early academic and behavioural signals.

Participants were divided into three facilitated group discussions, each assuming a distinct role:

- Pedagogic Diagnosticians – identifying academic and behavioural red flags

- Remediation Architects – designing support strategies without increasing faculty burnout
- Instructional Designers – transforming traditional lectures into dynamic learning environments

The group activities were highly engaging, reflective, and collegial, with participants actively contributing experiences from their own teaching contexts.

Plenary Discussions

The plenary sessions synthesised group outputs and introduced structured educational frameworks:

- Identification of red flag signs across academic, behavioural, clinical, and emotional domains
- Introduction to the Swansea 6D Model, presented by Dr Niraimathi, as a diagnostic and conversational framework for engaging with struggling learners
- Discussion on the FAIR framework (Feedback, Activity, Individualisation, Relevance) for learner support
- Application of Cognitive Load Theory to reduce extraneous load and optimise learning
- Practical strategies for representing diverse learner types (VARK) within routine PowerPoint-based large-group teaching, led by Dr Dinesh Kumar N

Key Take-Home Messages

- Struggling learners exist across all generations, including Gen Z
- Early identification enables proactive support rather than reactive remediation
- Labels matter; process-based terminology promotes dignity and growth
- Small, intentional changes in teaching design can significantly enhance learner support
- Faculty reflection and educational alliance are central to effective remediation

The session concluded with a reflective prompt asking participants to identify one change they would implement in their next teaching session, reinforcing the principle of immediate applicability. The programme concluded with the vote of thanks by Dr Divya Shanthy, acknowledging the speakers, moderator, and faculty participants for their enthusiastic participation and contributions.

Conclusion

The MEU session was widely appreciated for its innovative design, scholarly grounding, and high level of faculty engagement. It successfully fostered reflection, dialogue, and practical insights into supporting struggling learners within everyday teaching practice.

When a Learner Walks Away:

Early Signals and Support Strategies for Low Achievers

When a learner walks away, do we label them... weak / poor ? or do we pause and look closer ?



This penguin isn't lost. It's learning differently. The question is— will we notice early ?

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MEU JIPMER (Karaikal)



In just one word, how would you describe a 'struggling learner' in your setting?

Wordcloud Poll 15 responses 10 participants

