



AWARENESS OF LEARNING DISABILITIES AMONG SECONDARY TEACHER EDUCATION STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

The objective of the present study is to assess awareness of secondary teacher education students regarding learning disabilities. For this purpose, test of awareness regarding learning disability among secondary teacher education students has developed which helps to access the current knowledge level of secondary teacher education students. The lack of awareness among the general public as well as educators and officials in the education department is the first problem that needs to be addressed. The results revealed statistically significant differences in their awareness of learning disabilities overall and various domains across gender, locality and year of study. The findings of the study concluded that the secondary teacher education student had a meager knowledge about learning disability. It has been recommended that orientation programmes and workshops need to be conducted so that they can diagnose the problem of these children and intervene accordingly.

Keywords: Awareness, Learning Disability, Secondary Teacher Education Teacher.

INTRODUCTION

Teachers play an important role in any educational system. Teacher is an artist who moulds and shapes the physical, intellectual and moral powers of children. In any normal school one can find children with mild learning disabilities. Often, the children with severe disabilities enter into the special schools meant for them. But the children with mild learning disabilities are admitted in normal schools. If these disabilities are unnoticed, unanswered, ignored and such children's needs are not met in regular class rooms or special education within the school; we cannot fulfill the aim of universalisation of elementary education and equalisation of educational opportunity. It brings scholastic backwardness in these children.

Learning disabilities are very big challenge for schools and teachers. If the learning disabilities are ignored, unnoticed and unanswered such children's needs are not met in regular class rooms or special education within the school; we can't fulfill the aim of universalization of elementary education and equalization of educational opportunity (Lokanadhareddy, 2005). Individuals differ from each other in their physical, intellectual, emotional and behavioral traits. Teacher is an artist who moulds and shapes the physical, intellectual and moral power of the children. To accomplish their task effectively a teacher should be highly competent. The progress of a country depends up on the quality of its teachers and for this reason teaching is the noblest among all professions. Identification of a learning disabled child is the first step to prevent learning disabilities. Then only the teacher is able to distinguish between normal students and learning disabled students. Therefore the teacher should possess awareness of learning disabilities in children. Better awareness on the part of the teachers, about the concept,

causes, characteristics, identification and assessment of instructional materials and guidance and counseling needs helps to modify the teaching environment. Teachers are the child's first contact after school entry and the ideal person to detect a learning problem. Unfortunately, most either ignore the deficiency or blame it on the child's personality branding it as laziness, an attitude problem or aggression. The child continues to graduate from one class to the other totally inept at handling the pressure of the higher classes. This also leads to behavioral problems. Hence, there is a need to generate awareness regarding the problem amongst teachers.

LEARNING DISABILITY

Learning disability is a term that refers to a heterogeneous group of disturbances in the acquisition of learning skills. Such disturbances are not resulted from a physical disability, mental retardation, sensory disturbance or emotional disorders (NJCLD, 1994). Since the term "learning disability" has been suggested by "Samuel Kirk" in 1963, the increase in knowledge regarding has been evident as a result of the increasing research done in this specific area (Hallahan and Mercer, 2002). The introductory research on this field intended to promote a comprehensive understanding to the sub disabilities that are included in this term. It also sought to expand knowledge on the areas of diagnosis and intervention including adjustment in the methods of diagnosis and testing (Siegel, 2012). Undoubtedly, the process of learning is complex; it involves the acquisition of different academic skills.

According to the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (2006), learning disabilities are disorders that affect the ability to understand or use spoken or written language, do mathematical calculations,

coordinate movements, or direct attention. Although learning disabilities occur in very young children, the disorders are usually not recognized until the child reaches school age. Learning disabilities are a lifelong condition; they are not outgrown or cured, though many people develop coping techniques through special education, tutoring, medication, therapy, personal development, or adaptation of learning skills. Approximately 15 million children, adolescents, and adults have learning disabilities in the United States (National Center for Learning, 2006b).

SIGNS OF A LEARNING DISABILITY

While there is no one “sign” that a person has a learning disability, there are certain clues. Most relate to elementary school tasks, because learning disabilities tend to be identified in elementary school. This is because school focuses on the very things that may be difficult for the child—reading, writing, math, listening, speaking, reasoning. A child probably won’t show all of these signs, or even most of them. However, if a child shows a number of these problems, then parents and the teacher should consider the possibility that the child has a learning disability. When a child has a learning disability,

- may have trouble learning the alphabet, rhyming words, or connecting letters to their sounds;
- may make many mistakes when reading aloud, and repeat and pause often;
- may not understand what he or she reads;
- may have real trouble with spelling;
- may have very messy handwriting or hold a pencil awkwardly;
- may struggle to express ideas in writing;
- may learn language late and have a limited vocabulary;
- may have trouble remembering the sounds that letters make or hearing slight differences between words;
- may have trouble understanding jokes, comic strips, and sarcasm;
- may have trouble following directions;
- may mispronounce words or use a wrong word that sounds similar;
- may have trouble organizing what he or she wants to say or not be able to think of the word he or she needs for writing or conversation;
- may not follow the social rules of conversation, such as taking turns, and may stand too close to the listener;
- may confuse math symbols and misread numbers;
- may not be able to retell a story in order (what happened first, second, third); or

- may not know where to begin a task or how to go on from there.

If a child has unexpected problems learning to read, write, listen, speak, or do math, then teachers and parents may want to investigate more. The same is true if the child is struggling to do any one of these skills. The child may need to be evaluated to see if their have a learning disability.

TYPES OF LEARNING DISABILITIES

Learning disabilities can be divided into three broad categories: developmental speech and language disorders, academic skills disorders, and other (such as coordination disorders). Each category includes more specific disorders, which are described below:

Specific Learning Disability:

A disorder in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, write, spell or to do mathematical calculation. Included in this category are expressive writing disorders and other expressive language disorders.

Dyslexia

A person with dyslexia has average to above average intelligence, but has deficits in visual, auditory, or motor process, which interfere with reading and reading comprehension. The individual may also have difficulties with learning to translate printed words into spoken words with ease.

Dyscalculia

A person with dyscalculia has average to above average intelligence, but has difficulty with numbers or remembering facts over a long period of time. Some persons have spatial problems and difficulty aligning numbers into proper columns. Some persons may reverse numbers, and have difficulty in mathematical operations.

Dyspraxia

A person with dyspraxia has problems with messages from the brain being properly transmitted to the body. Though the muscles are not paralyzed or weak, they have problems working well together. Dyspraxia might also cause speech problems, poor posture, poor sense of directions, and/or difficulty with actions such as throwing and catching.

Auditory Perceptual Deficit

A person with auditory perceptual deficit has difficulty receiving accurate information from the sense of hearing (there is no problem with the individual's hearing, just in how the brain interprets what is heard) and might have problems understanding and remembering oral instructions, differentiating between similar sounds, or hearing one sound over a background noise.

Visual Perceptual Deficit

The individual has difficulties receiving and/or processing

accurate information from their sense of sight; might have a problem picking out an object from a background of other objects or seeing things in correct order.

NEED FOR THE STUDY

The number of children identified as learning disabled has increased greatly in recent years. Thus to find out the awareness about learning disabilities among teachers becomes imperative. Education promotes all round development of the child, which unites the soul, in transmission of entire values. Education is the tool which is used for the realization of individual and social aspiration and for meeting personal challenges. The national policy on education (1986) has made a significant contribution towards developing educational opportunities for the disabled children. Students of today are the citizens of tomorrow and they are going to be the pillars of the country. Hence it is essential to ensure that each pillar is as strong as the other is. Moreover, one cannot think of bringing about optimum human resource development without uplifting all categories of backward students. In India around 13-14% of all school children suffer from learning disorders (Krishnakumar, 1999). Unfortunately, most schools fail to lend a sympathetic ear to their problems. As a result, these children are often branded as failures. There has been an increasing awareness and identification of children with learning disabilities. Despite this growing interest, we still do not have the exact estimate of the prevalence of the problem in India.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study aims to identify the level of awareness on learning disabilities among secondary teacher education students. The teachers should realize that all children are special and that they have both strengths and weaknesses. To meet their learning requirements effectively, the teacher should have a thorough understanding of the nature of disabilities/abilities. For this, teacher should be familiar with the concept, causes, teaching method, guidance and counseling of learning disabilities. The present study intends to analyze the awareness on learning disabilities among secondary teacher education students with respect to gender, age, locality, optional subject, year of study, type of management, location of Institution and nature of college. It also helps to improve the quality of education and good learning environment and help the secondary teacher education students for identification of children with learning disabilities in their class room and provide good learning materials, guidance and counseling to children with learning disabilities.

So the investigator selected the study to identify the Awareness on Learning Disabilities among secondary teacher education students.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Poorna Shukla & Gaurav Agrawal (2015), found the low level of knowledge and awareness about learning disabilities among teachers of primary schools.

Gandhimati (2010) was found that majority of the respondents (66.2%) were found to have low level of overall awareness about learning disabilities in Triuverumbur block, Tiruchirappalli. Sarojiny (2000), result showed that the primary school teachers exhibited low level of awareness and the study revealed the need to generate awareness among primary school teachers towards learning disabilities in English.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The investigator tends a question that whether or not any significant awareness of Learning Disabilities among secondary teacher education students.

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Awareness

Awareness is, 'having knowledge of something / realizing something and also as interested in and knowing about something'. In the present study, the word 'awareness' is referred to the elementary school teachers' knowledge about various aspects of learning difficulties such as dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyspraxia, dyscalculia.

Learning Disabilities

"Learning disabilities are a generic term that refers to a heterogeneous group of disorder manifested by significant difficulties in the acquisition and use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning, or mathematical abilities. These disorders are intrinsic to individual and presumed to be due to central nervous system dysfunction" –National joint Committee for Learning Disabilities (NJCLD). In the present study learning disabilities includes dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyspraxia and dyscalculia. It is an imperfect ability to read, write, speak, spell, co-ordinate or to do mathematical calculation.

Secondary teacher education students

In present study secondary teacher education students means who are undergoing a pre-service training in teaching learning process to get experiences for development towards teaching their graduation in major discipline at college of education.

OBJECTIVES

To find out significant difference if any between Secondary teacher education students in the Awareness of Learning Disabilities with reference to the gender, locality, and year of study.

HYPOTHESES

There is no significant difference between secondary teacher education students in the Awareness of Learning Disabilities with respect to Gender, Locality, and the Year of Study.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

The normative descriptive survey design was used for this study. The researcher attempted to describe the significant

of awareness of secondary teacher education students about learning disabilities.

Area of the Study

The investigator selected the education colleges in Tiruvallur block, Tiruvallur District for conducted this study.

Universe, Sampling Method and Sample

The universe of the present study consists of secondary teacher education students in Tiruvallur block, Tiruvallur District. The random sampling method was adopted and the data was collected from 132 secondary teacher education students from the 5 education colleges.

FINDINGS

TABLE

There is no significant difference between secondary teacher education students in the Awareness of Learning Disabilities with respect to Gender, Locality, and the Year of Study.

Variables	Attributes	Frequency	Mean	SD	Calculated 't' Value	Remarks at 5% Level
Gender	Male	35	11.927	0.4506	2.01*	Significant
	Female	97	14.000	0.4982		
Locality	Rural	48	13.269	0.4736	2.387*	Significant
	Urban	84	14.684	0.4955		
Year of Study	First	60	16.14	0.462	1.992*	Significant
	Second	72	18.62	0.497		

(At 5% level of significance, the table value of t' is **1.96**)

DISCUSSION

- The calculated value of 't' is greater than the table value for degrees of freedom at 5% level, the hypothesis is rejected. Therefore there is significant difference between male and female students of awareness of learning disability. While comparing the mean scores of awareness of learning disability of female students have the mean score 14.000 and male students have the mean score 11.927. It proves that female students are better than the male students in their awareness of learning disability.

- The calculated value of 't' is greater than the table value for degrees of freedom at 5% level, the hypothesis is rejected. Therefore there is significant difference between rural and urban students of awareness of learning disability. While comparing the mean scores of awareness of learning disability of urban students have the mean score 14.684 and rural students have the mean score 13.2669. It proves that urban students are better than the rural students in their awareness of learning disability.
- The calculated value of 't' is greater than the table value for degrees of freedom at 5% level, the hypothesis is rejected. Therefore there is significant difference between first year and second year students of awareness of learning disability. While comparing the mean scores of awareness of learning disability of second year students have the mean score 18.62 and first year students have the mean score 16.14. It proves that second year students are better than the first year students in their awareness of learning disability.

EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

Based on the findings of the present study, the following suggestions are put forth for improving the existing educational practices.

- The study point out the need for improving their awareness on learning disabilities.
- Secondary teacher education students should provide appropriate guidance for those children with learning disabilities.
- The increasing identification of children with learning disorders highlights the particular need for guidance and counseling services within school to respond to individual students in distress.
- Guidance and counseling centre's should be made an essential part of the school system.
- A special education teacher should be appointed in schools for the services of differently abled students.
- The study suggests proper curriculum planning and implementation of learning disabilities related content in pre service teaching programmes for prospective teachers to develop a thorough knowledge on learning disabilities
- Awareness programmes on learning disabilities can be conducted state wide for the secondary teacher education students.
- Organize seminars, workshops and special training programmes in every school for teachers dealing children with learning disabilities every year.

- Secondary teacher education students who are providing special service in this sector should be highly acknowledged and awarded by educational planners and authorities
- Humanitarian approaches in the education of children with learning disabilities should be taken as a slogan by all.

CONCLUSION

Today, teachers are more aware and have positive attitude towards children with learning disabilities, but have less knowledge about the sign and symptoms and management of children with LD. The priority of the teachers is to be focused on helping all children learn to reach the highest levels of their potentials. School teachers were deficient in knowledge and skill in spite of working with children with LD. Another aspect of improvement in knowledge is improvement in attitude of teachers regarding the LD. Although the study sample was small, which limits the generalization of study, it can be concluded that knowledge, attitude and skills can be improved through learning packages. Future similar studies may be replicated on a larger sample, to determine the knowledge and attitude of parents of children with LD. It can also be done to determine the knowledge, attitude of teachers of higher classes regarding LD.

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