



AWARENESS OF LEARNING DISABILITY IN RURAL AND URBAN SCHOOL TEACHERS

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ABSTRACT:

Learning disability is one of most common problems seen in school going children. Teachers play an instrumental role in identifying children with learning disability. Awareness in teachers is an essential pre-requisite in enabling identification of LD. Fewer studies have been carried out in Indian context to determine awareness in teachers. The present study attempted to compare awareness in urban and rural school teachers in the Indian state of Karnataka. A questionnaire was formulated by the researchers after extensive literature review about learning disability, its causes, characteristics and intervention. This questionnaire was administered on 60 primary school teachers (30 rural and 30 urban) and their responses were analysed. The results were analysed for the two groups. It was observed that the knowledge and awareness of the rural teachers was almost equal to the urban school teachers, although there was a low level of knowledge about some aspects of learning disability for both the groups. Knowledge and awareness did not vary as a function of teaching experience. With the advance in technology and due to various sensitization programs primary school teachers have gained awareness about learning disability. However several myths about learning disability which still exist among them needs to be cleared.

KEYWORDS:

TEACHERS, LEARNING DISABILITY, KNOWLEDGE, SENSITIZATION, URBAN, RURAL.

INTRODUCTION

Learning Disability (LD) refers to neurologically based processing problem. Learning disability is conceptualized as an unexpected difficulty with one or more academic areas that occur among children of normal intelligence who have had adequate opportunity for learning and who do not have social disadvantages or behaviour or emotional problems. The term learning disability (LD) refers to difficulties with academic abilities such as reading, writing, spelling and mathematics. The most widely used definition of LD can be found in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). They defined LD as a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell or do mathematical calculations including conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia and developmental aphasia." These neurologically based disorders are intrinsic to the individual, presumed to be due to central nervous system dysfunction. Although LD may occur concomitantly with other handicapping conditions like sensory impairment, mental retardation or with extrinsic influences such as cultural differences, insufficient instruction. They are not the result of those conditions or influences. (Learning disability is more prevalent in a country like India. It is

estimated that about 9 million pupils in India have learning disability. In India around 13-14% of all school children suffer from learning disorder. The last two decades saw an increasing attention on the problems of learning disability, which according to Shiel Jr., (2017) is "A childhood disorder characterized by difficulty with certain skills such as reading or writing in individuals with normal intelligence". In India, it is estimated that at least five students in every average-sized class has Learning Disabilities (Mehta, 2015). LD still remains as an under recognized disability in a developing country like India. Unfortunately, in India, many children with LD often remain undiagnosed because of a general lack of awareness leading to chronic poor school performance, class detention and even dropping out of school (Karande et al., 2005).

Students with learning disabilities display one or more following primary characteristics like reading problems (decoding and / or comprehension), difficulties in written language, and underachievement in math. Secondary characteristics might include poor social skills, inattention, hyperactivity, and behavioural problems. According to American Psychiatric Association (2013), LD is diagnosed when the individual's achievement on individually administered, standardized tests in reading, mathematics, or written expression is substantially below that expected for age, schooling, and level of intelligence.

As the condition is widely prevalent, it would be the primary responsibility of teachers to identify and refer these children for intervention. Process of identification in turn depends on the knowledge, the teachers possess. At the primary level the teachers play a vital role in identifying children with LD. The teacher with knowledge about identification, definition, causes and skills or competencies can do better justice to the children with LD than teacher with general pedagogy backgrounds. Teachers require specific abilities, knowledge of different types of LD, causative factors, development of instructional strategies, apart from given guidance and counselling. There is a limited awareness of LD among parents, teachers, and psychologists who are the first to come across children with LD.

Kafonogo and Bali (2013), attempted to explore the awareness of classroom teachers about pupils with learning disabilities in Tanzania. They reported of satisfactory knowledge of the classroom teachers about learning disabilities. They identified that about 15% of pupils in regular schools have learning disabilities and that teachers had insufficient training as well as a low level of awareness about managing these pupils with learning disabilities.

Shukla and Agarwal(2015) studied the "Awareness of Learning Disabilities among Teachers of Primary Schools". They conducted an explorative research on 68 primary school teachers in 15 schools in Haridwar region and the study found low level of knowledge and awareness about learning disabilities among teachers of primary schools.

Gandhimathiand Eljo (2010)studied on the awareness about Learning Disabilities among the primary school teachers. The aim and objectives of the study was to assess the level of awareness about learning disabilities among the primary school teachers, to study the influential factors that determine the level of awareness, to suggest remedial measures to the teachers for handling children with learning disabilities. They found that majority of the respondents (66.2%) were found to have low level of overall awareness about learning disabilities.

Most of the studies in this direction have shown that teachers would have limited knowledge about the features of learning disability, which would impede the identification process(Ramaa andGowramma, 2002). Knowledge about learning disability is determined through the understanding of the concept of learning disability, its definition, characteristics, exclusionary conditions, co morbid co morbid conditions etc. For an effective referral a teacher should also be aware of the kind of remedial help which can be sought. The teachers are also expected to know about the professionals who can render services. The knowledge of teachers is assessed through questionnaires. The questionnaires configured by various professionals like special educators, psychologists are available to assess the knowledge of learning disability.

One of the most commonly used questionnaires was given by Saravanabhavan and Saravanabhavan (2001). The

questionnaire contains 40 multiple choice questions with one correct answer. The questions are assumed to cover 7 dimensions such as concept and definition, knowledge about incidence and prevalence, the causes, classification, clinical characteristics, investigations, treatment and outcome. Whereas, some researchers argued that the teachers may not essentially possess knowledge about incidence, prevalence and the causes of learning disability.

NEED FOR THE STUDY

Teachers are the people who would closely associate with pupils. It becomes their primary responsibility to identify children with learning disability and refer them for proper remedial help. Identification would depend on the teacher's knowledge. Knowledge of learning disability is said to be influenced by variables listed above. Some researchers contradict these findings stating that the knowledge is independent of variables. The present study aims to study such variables which may influence the knowledge. Locality of school would another potential variable which would influence the knowledge. Some teachers may be teaching in rural areas while others may be teaching in urban schools. This variable is not addressed in the studies carried out in this direction.

AIM

To study the knowledge of learning disability in primary school teachers, teaching in rural and urban areas.

METHOD

In order to assess the knowledge of learning disability in teachers, a new questionnaire was configured by the authors after reviewing the literature. The questionnaire had room for the teachers to fill details about their age, gender, educational qualification, and years of teaching experience. The questions were presented in bilingual (Kannada/English) format. It comprised of 30 questions covering 5 domains such as perspectives, causes, characteristics, exclusionary conditions and intervention.

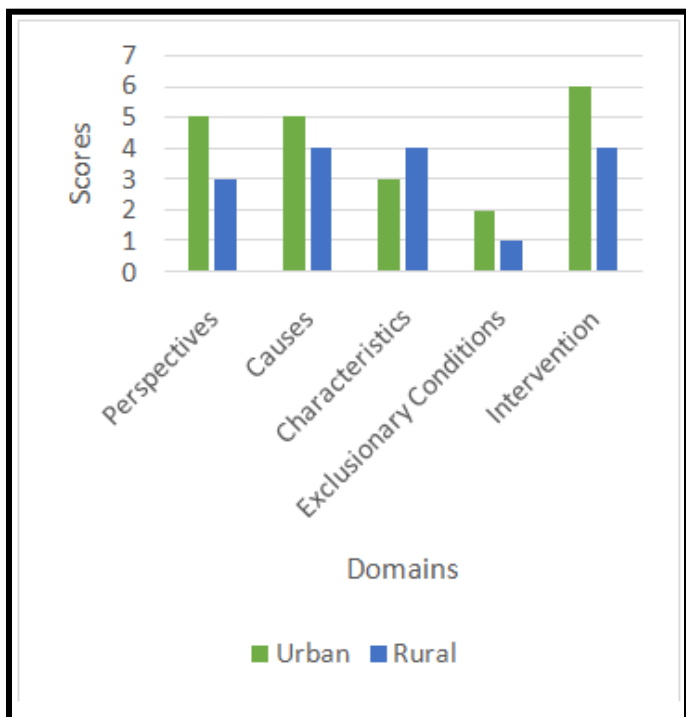
The questionnaire was presented to 30 primary school teachers (15 males and 15 females) belonging to 5 different schools in an urban set up and 30 teachers (15 males and 15 females) from 5 different schools in a rural set up. All the teachers were working in an aided school setup. Teachers were not being sensitized about learning disability formally. Urban school teachers had teaching experience of 6 to 25 years while rural school teachers had teaching experience of 2 to 26 years.

Teachers were asked to answer by denoting 'Yes' or 'No' by reading each question. The questions on the five different domains were randomised and presented. The researchers compared the answer given by the teachers with the intended answers. If the answer matched the intended answer a score of 1 was given otherwise a score of 0 was given.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results was analysed in two steps. The number of

correct responses given by urban school teachers and rural school teachers on the five domains were compared in the first step, whereas in the second step, the responses given by teachers were compared with the other attributes such as age, gender, years of teaching experience, educational qualification. Urban school teachers obtained a mean score of 21, while rural school teachers obtained a mean score of 16. Scores obtained by each group have been depicted in Graph 1. Urban school teachers obtained maximum scores for the domain intervention and minimum score for the domain exclusionary conditions. Most of the teachers had confusion regarding exclusionary conditions for example they believed that children with learning disability would experience difficulties due to lower IQ.



GRAPH.1: SCORES OBTAINED BY URBAN AND RURAL TEACHERS IN VARIOUS DOMAINS.

Rural school teachers obtained maximum scores on characteristics unlike the urban school teachers while they obtained minimum scores on the domain exclusionary conditions similar to that of urban school teachers. Individual scores obtained by the teachers was compared for attributes like gender, years of teaching experience and educational qualification. When the performance of teachers was analysed with respect to age, it was seen that younger teachers performed better than older teachers. This was true for both urban and rural groups. Male teachers obtained slightly better score (20 and 19) than females (18 and 16). This was true for both urban and rural school teachers.

Performance of teachers did not vary as a function of teaching experience. For the purpose of analysis, the teachers were divided into three groups, teachers with less than 10 years of experience, teachers with experience of

11-20 years and teachers with experience of 20-30 years. The mean scores for the three groups were almost similar showing that the performance did not vary as a function of teaching experience. Educational qualification was almost alike for all the teachers, most of them had done their D.Ed program and only 5 (2 urban and 3 rural teachers) were graduates. All the teachers performed alike.

As discussed above, our study is in coherence with the findings reported in earlier literature (Gandhimathi and Eljo, 2010; Kafonogo and Bali, 2013; Shukla and Agarwal, 2015) and upholds the finding that there is a low level of awareness among the primary school teachers about learning disability.

CONCLUSION

Overall it was observed that the performance varied with respect to locality (urban versus rural) with urban school teachers out performing rural school teachers. Younger teachers performed better compared to older teachers, however the difference was very minimal. Male teachers performed better compared to female teachers and the knowledge of teachers did not vary as a function of educational experience probably because only few teachers were more qualified than others.

The overall study was carried out with the aim of studying the knowledge of learning disability in urban and rural primary school teachers. With advance in technology and sensitisation program, teachers have gained knowledge however there are certain myths in the teachers regarding learning disability which needs to be cleared.

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