

Attitude of Primary School Teachers towards Learning Disabilities in Children - An Intervention Study

Neha¹, Dr. K. S. Roopa²

¹Ph.D. Research Scholar, Department of Human Development and Research Centre, Smt. V.H.D. Central Institute of Home Science, Affiliated to Bangalore University, Seshadri Road, Bengaluru, Karnataka, India
Email id: hmeha1990[at]gmail.com

²Associate Professor, Guide and Principal, Smt. V.H.D. Central Institute of Home Science, Affiliated to Bangalore University, Seshadri Road, Bengaluru, Karnataka, India
Email id: ksroopa15[at]gmail.com

Abstract: *The attitude of a teacher can be detrimental in shaping the lives of their students. If a teacher invests slightly lesser interest or is partial towards some children, it will certainly have a negative impact on the child. The same might happen in the lives of a child with learning disabilities (LD), but this has a larger impact on a child with LD than it may have on his/her peer. A child with LD can have specific problems in reading, writing, spelling and/or arithmetic and may also display severe discrepancy in intellectual capabilities and academic achievement. When they are not given appropriate help and/or opportunities, they may lose interest and concentration in academics. Hence, it is vital for a teacher to identify as well as develop a favorable attitude towards learning disabled children. The present study was designed to study the impact of an intervention program on the attitude of primary school teachers belonging to the experimental group and to assess and compare their attitude towards children with LD. The sample consisted of 64 primary school teachers from 5 government and 5 private schools of Urban Bengaluru District who were a part of experimental group. These respondents attended a three-month intervention program which was designed to enhance the attitudes of the group towards children with LD. The tool used for the pre-test to assess their attitude was reused to study the impact of the intervention program of the experimental group leaving a gap of 2 months after the intervention ended. The collected data from the respondents was tabulated and statistically analyzed using percentage, mean, standard deviation, chi-square and the paired 't' test. The results revealed that majority of respondents belonged to the age group of 41-50 years, were married and had 2 children. The mean score percentage was found to be higher during the post-test as compared to the pre-test score among both government and private school respondents. With respect to the attitude levels, majority of both the government and private school respondents showed moderate level of attitude in the pre-test whereas in the post-test, they had a favorable attitude towards learning-disabled children and none of them were left in the unfavorable level of attitude category after being exposed to an intervention program.*

Keywords: attitude, intervention program, learning disabilities

1. Introduction

In today's day and age, having an educational degree is important, without which one fails to earn any respect or adoration from the society in general, and sometimes even their own families. For students who are doing well, it is never really a big problem. But for those with problems in learning, getting a degree might seem like a farfetched dream more than a reality. Under this massive umbrella of children with learning problems, we have a serious learning issue, commonly referred to as learning disabilities (LD).

Learning disabilities are due to genetic and/or neurobiological factors that modify the functioning of the brain in a manner which affects one or more cognitive processes related to learning. These processing problems most often interfere with the learning of basic skills such as reading, writing and/or mathematics. Complex skills such as organization, time planning, abstract reasoning, long or short-term memory and attention can also be interfered with, making learning a tiresome task for such children.

Children with learning disabilities have average or above average intelligence. These often appear as a gap between the individual's potential and actual achievement. That is

why LD are referred to as "hidden disabilities" by most educators and scientists. The child looks perfectly 'normal' and appear to be a bright and intelligent student, and yet may be incapable of demonstrating the necessary, let alone, expected skills from someone of a similar age.

Another important aspect to remember is that LD should not be confused with problems which are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor handicaps; of intellectual disability; of emotional disturbance; or of environmental, cultural or economic disadvantages.

The National Joint committee on Learning Disabilities (1997) states that:

- 1) Learning disabilities are heterogeneous groups of disorders. Individuals with learning disabilities exhibit many kinds of behaviors and characteristics.
- 2) Learning disabilities result in significant difficulties in the acquisition and use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning, or mathematical skills.
- 3) The problem is intrinsic to the individual. Learning disabilities are due to factors within the person rather than external factors, such as the environment or the educational system.

- 4) The problem is presumed to be related to the central nervous system dysfunction. There may be biological basis to the problem.
- 5) Learning disabilities may occur along with other disabilities or conditions. Individuals can have several problems at the same time, such as learning disabilities and emotional disorders.

The National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (2016) stated a more advanced definition which said that 'Learning Disabilities' is a general term that refers to a heterogeneous group of disorders manifested by significant difficulties in the acquisition and use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning, or mathematical abilities. These disorders are intrinsic to the individual, presumed to be due to central nervous system dysfunction, and may occur across the life span. Problems in self-regulatory behaviors, social perception and social interaction may exist with learning disabilities but do not by themselves, constitute a learning disability. Although learning disabilities may occur concomitantly with other disabilities (for example, sensory impairment, intellectual disabilities, emotional disturbance), or with extrinsic influences (such as cultural or linguistic differences, insufficient or inappropriate instruction), they are not the result of those conditions or influences.

Learning disabilities are one of the important issues in primary care in India. India is thought to have approximately ninety million people with varying degrees of learning disabilities and an average class in schools has about five students with learning disabilities out of 55 children in the class. Up to 5-10% of "seemingly normal" school children have this hidden disability. The only way to handle the situation is early detection and intervention by which the symptoms of unacceptable language and behavior can be minimized.

At the elementary school level, teachers play an essential role in identifying children with LD. A teacher with right kind of knowledge and competencies can do better justice to children with LD than teacher with general pedagogy backgrounds. Another imperative criterion to be considered here is the attitude of the teacher, as her/his role plays a crucial one in the life of a learning-disabled child.

Eagly and Chaiken (1993) rightly defined attitude as "a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor. It involves three components: emotional component (how the object, person, issue or event makes you feel), cognitive component (your thoughts and beliefs about the subject) and behavioral component (how the attitude influences your behavior)". Once a teacher understands about LD, having a positive attitude towards learning-disabled children will be easier as it helps to build confidence in them (the children), raising their self-esteem and understanding themselves better to deal with the life-long hidden disability.

Das et al., (2013) stated that primary school teachers have unfavorable attitude with regard to LD in children and a limited or low competence in teaching learning disabled children in a regular classroom.

In the light of the above discussion, an attempt was made by the researcher to study the impact of the intervention program on the attitude of primary school teachers working in government and private schools in Urban Bengaluru district.

2. Methodology

2.1 Objectives

- a) To assess and compare the attitude of primary school teachers from government and private schools towards children with LD.
- b) To design a module of an intervention program for teachers on LD in children.
- c) To study the impact of the intervention program provided to the experimental group of teachers from government and private schools on their attitude towards learning-disabled children.

2.2 Hypothesis

- a) Primary school teachers from government and private schools will have a moderate level of attitude towards children with LD.
- b) There will be an enhancement in the post-test attitude scores among the experimental groups from both government and private schools as compared to the pre and post-test attitude scores.
- c) There will be a significant improvement in the attitude level towards learning-disabled children among the experimental group after the intervention program.

2.3 Selection of Sample and Sampling Technique

The researcher surveyed primary schools in Urban Bengaluru district. Thirty-two schools were identified and 400 teachers who were teaching primary schoolchildren studying in the 1st to 4th grades were selected in the first phase of the study. In the second phase of the study, an experimental group was constituted of 64 primary school teachers (32 each from 5 government and 5 private schools). These teachers were selected out of the sample of 400 teachers who were a part of the pre-test. The teachers who showed interest towards participating in the intervention program and the schools who gave permission to attend were part of the program.

2.4 Tool

The investigator developed a questionnaire for the purpose of studying the attitude of teachers towards children with LD. The tool consisted of two parts: Part A and B. Part A contained items related to the basic data of the respondents and part B had a total of 31 statements on specific data related to the attitude of teachers towards children with LD, for which the responses were to be marked using the 5-point scale. The tool was developed keeping in mind to use for the pre and post-test.

2.5 Procedure

The tool developed by the researcher was administered for 400 primary school teachers working in government and private schools in the first phase of the study to evaluate their attitude towards LD in children. Then in the second phase, 64 teachers became a part of the experimental group. A module of intervention program was designed by the investigator with respect to LD in children, which would help the teachers understand more about the disability. The necessary permissions for teachers was obtained from the administration of the educational institutions. Once confirmed, the investigator met the teachers during their specified free time to make them understand the implication of the intervention program. The respondents were then given an official invitation to be a part of the program. The

sessions were conducted every Saturday for a period of 3 months from 22nd June 2019 to 7th September 2019.

On the last day of the intervention program, feedback was also collected from the respondents. The researcher gave a gap of 2 months before collecting the post-test data by administering the same tool which was used for the pre-test for the experimental group of respondents. The collected data was tabulated and subjected to statistical analysis.

3. Results and Discussion

The data collected from the respondents was tabulated and statistically analyzed by applying percentage, mean, standard deviation and the paired 't' test. Figure 1 shows the classification of respondents by their age.

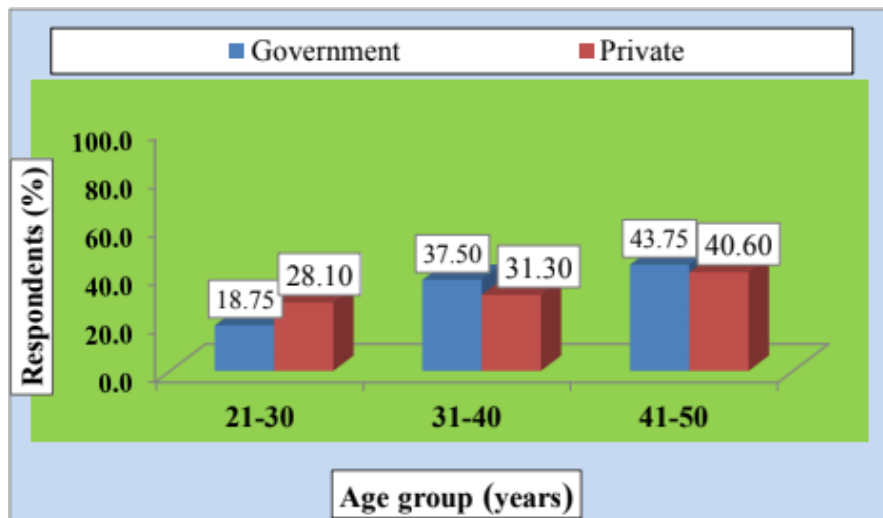


Figure 1: Classification of government and private school respondents by age group

Figure 1 shows the classification of the experimental group of respondents based on their age. A high percentage of respondents from government schools (43.75%) belonged to the age group of 41 to 50 years, followed by 37.50 percent in the age group of 31 to 40 years and 18.75 percent from the age group between 21 to 30 years. Among the private school respondents, 40.60 percent were from the age group of 41 to 50 years, 31.30 percent belonged to the 31 to 40 years age

group and 28.10 percent of them were between 21 to 30 years. Combined results showed that among the respondents from both government and private schools, majority (42.20%) belonged to the age group of 41 to 50 years. The chi-square value was found to be 0.82, which showed a non-significant association. Figure 2 shows the distribution of respondents based on their marital status.

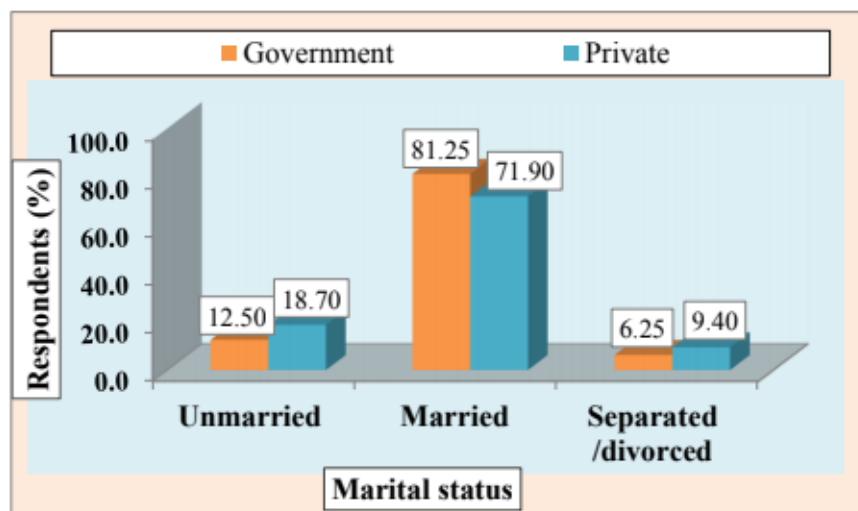


Figure 2: Classification of government and private school respondents by marital status

Figure 2 reveals data regarding the marital status of the respondents. It is evident from the above table that a higher percentage (81.25%) of respondents from government schools were married, followed by 12.50 percent who were unmarried and 6.25 percent of them were either divorced or separated. With regard to respondents from private schools, 71.90 percent of them were married, 18.70 percent were unmarried and 9.40 percent of them were divorced or separated.

Combined results showed that a large percentage (76.60%) of respondents from government and private schools were married. However, statistically the results were found to be non-significant. Figure 3 shows the distribution of respondents based on variable 'number of children'.

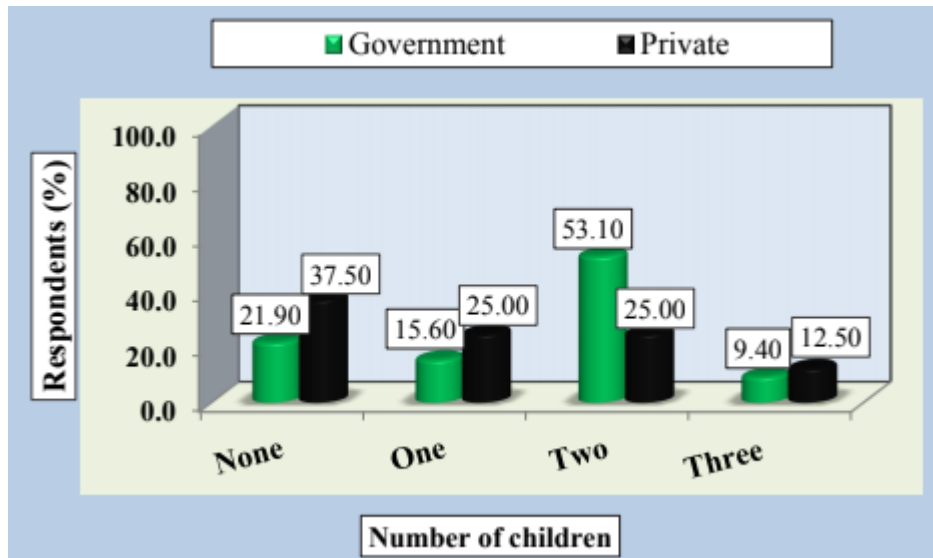


Figure 3: Classification of respondents by number of children

Figure 3 describes the data regarding classification of respondents based on the number of children in the family of the experimental group of respondents. Majority of respondents (53.10%) from government schools had two children, 21.90 percent of them did not have any children, 15.60 percent of had only one child and 9.40 percent of them had three children. In case of the private school respondents, 37.50 percent of them did not have children, followed by an equal percentage (25.00) having one and two children respectively and 12.50 percent of them had three children.

It is inferred from the combined results that majority of the respondents (39.10%) from both government and private schools had two children. The obtained chi-square value of 5.39 showed non-significant association. Table 1 contains data on the overall mean pre and post-test attitude scores towards LD in children among the respondents of experimental group.

Table 1: Overall mean pre and post-test attitude scores among experimental group of respondents towards children with learning disabilities, n=64

Group of respondents	Statements	Max. Score	Test	Attitude Scores				Paired 't' Test
				Mean	SD	Mean (%)	SD (%)	
Government School (n=32)	31	155	Pre	81.16	6.92	52.4	4.5	28.92**
			Post	137.44	15.56	88.7	10.0	
			Enhancement	56.28	11.01	36.3	7.1	
Private school (n=32)	31	155	Pre	91.16	12.03	58.8	7.8	30.27**
			Post	135.48	15.48	87.7	10.0	
			Enhancement	44.78	8.31	28.9	5.4	

**Significant at 1% level
t (0.01,31df) = 2.58

Table 1 illustrates the overall mean pre-test and post-test attitude scores on learning disabilities in children among the experimental group. Among government school respondents, the mean score percentage was found to be higher in post-test (88.70) as compared to pre-test mean score percentage (52.40). The enhancement was found to be 36.30 for government school respondents. The obtained 't' value was found to be significant at 1 percent level (t=28.92). The mean score percentage of private school respondents

during pre-test was 58.80 and during post-test the mean score was increased to 87.70. The enhancement in mean score was seen to be 28.90. The 't' value was found to be 30.27 and was significant at 1 percent level, thereby accepting the hypothesis set for the study.

The individual difference in both the groups was found to have increased during post-test. The initial score of private school respondents was more than that of government

school respondents and the enhancement after intervention is more for government school respondents. The difference in the enhancement of scores after intervention among the government and private school respondents was also noticed. A study conducted by Williams et.al. (2013) on competencies of school teachers regarding LD also showed a difference in the mean pre and post-test attitude scores. The mean post-test attitude scores showed an increase in scores due to the 'learning package' devised for the experimental group.

Table 2 shows data on the experimental group of respondents' pre-test and post-test attitude level towards LD in children.

Table 2: Experimental group of respondents' pre-test and post-test attitude level on learning disabilities in children, n=64

Attitude Level	Government school respondents				Private school respondents			
	Pre test		Post test		Pre test		Post test	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Unfavorable	9	28.1	0	0.0	10	31.3	0	0.0
Moderate	23	71.9	10	31.3	22	68.7	11	34.4
Favorable	0	0.0	22	68.7	0	0.0	21	65.6
Total	32	100.0	32	100.0	32	100.0	32	100.0
χ^2 Test	36.11**				34.67**			

**Significant at 1% level

χ^2 (0.05,2df) = 9.210

Table2 depicts the pre and post-test frequency of the experimental group of respondents related on the attitude level towards children with LD. During the pre-test, majority of respondents from government schools (71.90%) had moderate attitude levels, 28.10 percent of them had an unfavorable level of attitude and none of them had a favorable level of attitude towards LD in children. During the post-test, a higher percentage (68.70%) of them had a favorable level of attitude and 31.30 percent of them had moderate level of attitude and none of them were left in the unfavorable level of attitude category after an intervention program. The obtained chi-square value of 36.11 was found to be significant at 1 percent level.

Among the private school respondents, during the pre-test a higher percentage of them (68.70%) had moderate levels of attitude, 31.30 percent had an unfavorable level and none of them had favorable levels of attitude. During the post-test after the intervention program, 65.60 percent had a favorable level of attitude, 34.40 percent had moderate levels and none had unfavorable levels of attitude anymore. The chi-square value of 34.67 was found to be significant at 1 percent level thereby accepting the hypothesis set for the study. A study by Woodcock and Vialle (2013) showed that primary school teachers had a favorable positive attitude towards students with specific learning disability (SLD) than their secondary counterparts.

Respondents during post-test have reported a higher frequency on the level of attitude as compared to the pre-test scores. While there were no respondents at the favorable level of attitude during the pre-test, most of them have moved to the favorable level during post-test. An

improvement in the overall perception of attitude towards children with LD was found in both the government and private school respondents after an intervention.

4. Conclusion

The findings of the study revealed that majority of the primary school teachers from both government and private schools had moderate attitude levels towards children with LD during the pre-test. The intervention program did help in increasing the level of attitude of the experimental group of respondents, which showed a shift in the results as most respondents displayed a favorable attitude level during the post-test. Learning disability interferes with the learning and processing capacities of a child. The attitude of teachers is of chief importance while teaching at elementary school levels, as these children can either be helped and encouraged or shunned and ignored. A little patience and guidance from teachers can show children the pathway to success in their life.

References

- [1] Al-Ahmadi., A. (2009). Teachers' perspectives and attitudes towards integrating students with learning disabilities in regular Saudi public schools. Retrieved from https://etd.ohiolink.edu/!etd.send_file?accession=ohiou1241556018&disposition=
- [2] Asthana., H. S., Bhushan., B. (2016). Statistics for Social Sciences – Second Edition. PHI Learning Pvt. Ltd., Delhi, India.
- [3] Eagly., A., Chaiken., S. (1993). The Psychology of Attitudes. Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- [4] Das., A. K., Kuyini., A.B., Desai., I. P. (2013). Inclusive education in India: are the teachers prepared? IJSE, 28. – cited from Shari, M., Mysore., V. N. (2016). Primary school teachers towards children with learning disabilities. Journal Indian Association of Child and Adolescent Mental Health, Volume 12(4), pp:323-335.
- [5] Karande., S. (2008). Current challenges in managing specific learning disability in Indian children, Journal of Postgraduate Medicine, 54(2), pp:75-77.
- [6] Mehra.,V., Thapa., K., Van Der Aalsvoort., G., Pandey., J. (2008). Perspectives on learning disabilities in India – Current Practices and Prospects. Sage Publications India Pvt. Ltd, New Delhi. Pp: 24.
- [7] Nakra., O. (2007). Children and Learning Difficulties. Allied Publishers Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi pp: 2-6.
- [8] Saini., B. L. (2002). Education of exceptional children. Ludhiana: Tandon Publications, pp:56-67.
- [9] Shari., M., Mysore., V. N. (2016). Primary school teachers towards children with learning disabilities. Journal Indian Association of Child and Adolescent Mental Health, Volume 12(4), pp:323-335.
- [10] Swain., A.K.P.C. (2008). A Textbook of Research Methodology. Kalyani Publishers, New Delhi, India.
- [11] Thomas., S., Bhanutej., K., John., S. (2003). Dealing with dyslexia. The Week, 21, pp:36-42.
- [12] Werts., M. G., Culatta., R. A., Tomphins., J. R. (2011). Fundamentals of Special Education - What

Every Teachers Needs to Know, Third Edition, Pearson Education. Inc, Publishing as Prentice Hall, PHI Learning Pvt. Ltd, Delhi, pp:121.

- [13] Woodcock., S. (2013). Trainee teachers' attitudes towards students with specific learning disabilities. Australian Journal of Teacher Education, 38(8), pp:16-29.

Website

- [14] <https://ldaamerica.org/types-of-learning-disabilities/#:~:text=Learning%20disabilities%20are%20due%20to,%2C%20writing%20and%20For%20math.>
- [15] <https://njcld.files.wordpress.com/2018/10/learning-disabilities-issues-on-definition-1990.pdf>