

## An Examination of Elementary School Teachers' Awareness of Learning Disabilities

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### ABSTRACT

Learning disabilities are a big challenge in elementary education, with teachers needing specialized knowledge and awareness to identify them early and treat them effectively. This research seeks to determine the awareness of elementary school teachers regarding learning disabilities, specifically in identifying symptoms, adjusting instructional approaches, and providing support to students with learning challenges. The study utilizes a mixed-method design using a structured questionnaire to collect information from 450 elementary school teachers who were selected using stratified random sampling. Statistical methods like regression and ANOVA were utilized to examine the data. The results vary in the degree of awareness among teachers depending on variables like age, level of teaching experience, level of education, and special education training received earlier. Though a vast number of respondents had received training in special education, inconsistencies existed in their capacity to differentiate learning disabilities from academic difficulties. The research emphasizes the importance of overall professional development programs, focused training modules, and policy interventions to fill knowledge gaps and improve inclusive education practices. Enhancing teacher awareness and capability in managing learning disabilities is essential to create a supportive and equitable learning environment that allows all students to achieve their full potential.

**Keywords:** Learning Disabilities, Elementary School Teachers, Teacher Awareness, Inclusive Education, Special Education Training, Instructional Adaptation, Early Intervention.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Learning disability is among the most complex illnesses seen in the fields of psychology and the education of extraordinary children. Despite possessing an average IQ and lacking any physical or mental issues, children through learning disabilities experience learning difficulties, resulting in their school performance being far below expectations. Numerous students experience disappointment due to their inability to achieve academic success, ultimately leading to premature school withdrawal (Kakabarae et al., 2012). Moreover, if their issues remain unacknowledged and appropriate intervention programs are not implemented, the likelihood of disorders such as depression, anxiety, and delinquency escalate for these youngsters. The estimated prevalence of learning disorders globally ranges from 3 to 12%, and educators with classes of 20 to 25 students may have one or more pupils with learning problems (Washburn et al., 2017). The prevalence of learning disabilities among school pupils is estimated to be between 2% and 20-40%. Consequently, given the pervasiveness of students with learning disabilities in primary schools, it is essential for primary school teachers to possess a deeper understanding of this phenomenon than their counterparts and to effectively identify such students in their classrooms using established scientific criteria. Teachers, as administrators of educational programs within schools, are essential providers and architects of education. Their expertise with pedagogical approaches and awareness of the challenges and behavioral deficiencies faced by students is of paramount importance (Menon, 2016).

Primary school teachers have a central role in determining the educational path of young students, especially those with learning disabilities (LD). Their capacity to recognize, comprehend, and respond to the specific difficulties encountered by students with LD is important in creating a comprehensive and nurturing learning environment (Al-Yagon, 2012). Yet, studies suggest that few teachers might not be properly trained or sensitized to identify early learning disability symptoms, which could result in misdiagnosis, inefficient instructional approaches, and poor academic performance over time for such students. Learning disabilities being typically unseen and not caused by intellectual impairments or physical handicaps, teachers are required to draw upon expert knowledge and observation skills to differentiate them from typical learning difficulties. Lacking appropriate awareness and intervention, LD students can suffer from frustration, low self-esteem, and higher dropout rates. Additionally, poor teacher preparation can prevent inclusive education policy from being implemented successfully, leaving students without the right accommodations to succeed (Cox, 2016). Considering the tremendous effect that learning disabilities exert on the academic and personal growth of students, this research aims to explore elementary school teachers' knowledge about learning disabilities, including their capacity to recognize symptoms, modify instructional approaches, and extend support. By determining the degree of awareness among teachers, the research seeks to identify the gaps in existing awareness and underscore the importance of focused training modules for developing their competency in dealing with students with LD effectively. Ultimately, enhancing teachers' awareness of learning disabilities is critical for developing a more inclusive learning environment that enables all students, regardless of their learning disabilities, to reach their maximum potential (Monsen et al., 2014).

With an eye toward detecting, supporting, and adjusting instruction for children with learning impairments, this study aims to investigate primary school teachers' understanding of LD and their perceptions of it. Teachers' knowledge of LD, their openness to using effective teaching strategies, and their perspectives on inclusive education must be studied urgently due to the increasing number of students with LD in school.

This research aims to establish the level at which teachers can identify early indicators of learning disabilities, distinguish them from academic difficulties in general, and utilize proper interventions to improve student performance.

### Objective of Study

1. To study the teacher's understanding of Learning Disabilities.
2. To find out if the educational qualification of the teachers hinders their approach to teaching children with Learning Disabilities

## 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Teachers should familiarize themselves with learning disorders because of the profound impact that early identification and intervention can have on students' academic progress. Reading, writing, spelling, and thinking are just a few of the many areas that can be affected by learning disorders. Teachers' knowledge, attitudes, and preparedness to deal with such challenges in different classroom settings have been the subject of research. This literature review seeks to shed light on teachers' knowledge levels, instructional practices, and the impression of socio-demographic factors on their conceptual understanding of learning disorders by examining important research evidence from different locations. The purpose of this evaluation is to draw attention to the need for more robust professional development programs that address inclusive education by analyzing this research in an effort to identify areas where teacher training is lacking. A wide range of diseases are encompassed by the term "learning disability," all of which relate to difficulties with reading, writing, spelling, and reasoning. Ghimire (2017) studied sixteen different schools in Dharan, Nepal. Using a convenience sample strategy, we selected around 150 primary school educators. There is a lack of knowledge about learning disabilities among the teachers. In order to identify learning disabilities in school-aged children early on, educators have a key role to play.

Garbutt (2018) sought to promote inclusive education by investigating how public primary school teachers in Trans-Nzoia County, Kenya, viewed and dealt with students' learning issues. This study was informed by Vygotsky's social constructivist theory of disability, which emphasizes the role of social and cultural circumstances in facilitating the instructional engagement, classroom transformation, and overall development of students with learning difficulties.

Alahmadi et al. (2019) set out to evaluate Saudi Arabian primary school instructors' familiarity with students' specific learning disabilities. The majority of primary school instructors have a moderate grasp of various sorts of learning difficulties, according to the survey. The study did not find any difference between male and female educators in their comprehension of learning difficulties, despite the fact that there is a statistically significant association between this and their socio-demographic characteristics. This research by Lipka et al., 2020 looked at how teachers at a public school in Israel felt toward students with learning difficulties. The purpose of this research was to examine how often teachers interact with children who have LD, as well as their attitudes toward, understanding of, and preparation for working with LD students. The results showed that teachers had positive attitudes toward students with learning impairments and regularly interacted with them. The purpose of the study by Konuk Er et al., 2023 is to determine how well pre-school educators understand the characteristics of learning difficulties displayed by children in the pre-school years, namely those in the age bracket of three

to six. Factors such as “years of experience, number of students with learning disabilities taught, inclusion of students with disabilities, having a family member requiring special education, and teaching students with learning disabilities all have a role in the degree to which teachers understand the cognitive, affective, social, and motor aspects of learning disabilities”. Despite teachers' central role in recognizing and assisting children with learning difficulties, the reviewed research imply that instructors' knowledge and readiness to do so vary substantially. Significant influences on their ability to provide effective help include prior teaching experience, exposure to students with learning disabilities, and specialized training. Studies have shown mixed results when it comes to instructional adaptation and awareness; some find good teacher attitudes and student-teacher relationships, while others find gaps. In light of these results, it is clear that inclusive education policies, comprehensive teacher training programs, and legislative measures are necessary to prepare educators with the knowledge & skills necessary to foster a welcoming classroom for students of diverse backgrounds.

### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Findings from this study on elementary school teachers' knowledge of students with LD are based on a mixed-method research strategy. Quantitative methods were used, in which a structured questionnaire was applied to gather information. The target population was the elementary school teachers from different institutions, and 450 respondents were selected to serve as samples with the aim of ensuring diversity and representation. A stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure teachers from various types of schools (government, private, and other institutions) and years of teaching experience were included. The questionnaire consisted of demographic variables, multiple-choice questions, and Likert-scale items to measure teachers' awareness levels of learning disabilities. The data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics, frequency and percentage analysis to present demographic information, and mean and standard deviation to calculate awareness levels. The statistical analysis utilised regression and ANOVA.

### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### Demographic Profile of Respondents

**Table 1. Demographic Profile of Respondents**

Variables	Sub-construct	Frequency
<b>Age</b>	20–30 years	119
	31–40 years	301
	41–50 years	29
	51 years and above	1
<b>Gender</b>	Male	109
	Female	341
<b>Years of Teaching Experience</b>	Less than 5 years	185
	5–10 years	203
	11–15 years	33
	16 years and above	29
<b>Qualification</b>	Bachelor's Degree	65
	Master's Degree	123
	M.Ed.	87
	Others (please specify)	175
<b>Training in Special Education</b>	Yes	385
	No	65
<b>Type of School</b>	Government School	266
	Private School	165

	Other (please specify)	19
<b>Class Level Taught</b>	Primary	132
	Secondary	147
	Higher Secondary	38
	Other (please specify)	133

### Descriptive Analysis

**Table 2. Learning disabilities are a common issue in mainstream classrooms**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<b>Valid</b>	Strongly Disagree	30	6.7	6.7	6.7
	Disagree	26	5.8	5.8	12.4
	Neutral	36	8.0	8.0	20.4
	Agree	236	52.4	52.4	72.9
	Strongly agree	122	27.1	27.1	100.0
	Total	450	100.0	100.0	

**Table 3. Learning disabilities should be addressed individually to enhance student learning**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<b>Valid</b>	Strongly Disagree	33	7.3	7.3	7.3
	Disagree	21	4.7	4.7	12.0
	Neutral	63	14.0	14.0	26.0
	Agree	197	43.8	43.8	69.8
	Strongly agree	136	30.2	30.2	100.0
	Total	450	100.0	100.0	

**Table 4. Children with learning disabilities often go unnoticed in the classroom**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<b>Valid</b>	Strongly Disagree	35	7.8	7.8	7.8
	Disagree	36	8.0	8	15.8
	Neutral	49	10.9	10.9	26.7
	Agree	182	40.4	40.4	67.1
	Strongly agree	148	32.9	32.9	100.0
	Total	450	100.0	100.0	

**Table 5. Teachers need more training on identifying and supporting students with learning disabilities**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	43	9.6	9.6	9.6
	Disagree	27	6.0	6.0	15.6
	Neutral	47	10.4	10.4	26.0
	Agree	192	42.7	42.7	68.7
	Strongly agree	141	31.3	31.3	100.0
	Total	450	100.0	100.0	

**Table 6. Learning disabilities affect the academic performance of students significantly**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	47	10.4	10.4	10.4
	Disagree	19	4.2	4.2	14.7
	Neutral	62	13.8	13.8	28.4
	Agree	191	42.4	42.4	70.9
	Strongly agree	131	29.1	29.1	100.0
	Total	450	100.0	100.0	

**Data Analysis****Table 7. Model Summary**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.520 <sup>a</sup>	.270	.262	.946
a. Predictors: (Constant), Challenges, Confidence, Knowledge, Awareness, Perception				

**Table 8. ANOVA<sup>a</sup>**

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	147.277	5	29.455	32.926	<.001 <sup>b</sup>
Residual	397.203	444	.895		
Total	544.480	449			
a. Dependent Variable: Qualification					
b. Predictors: (Constant), Challenges, Confidence, Knowledge, Awareness, Perception					

**Table 9. Coefficients<sup>a</sup>**

Model	Unstandardized B	Coefficients Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
1(Constant)	.037	.249		.150	.881
Challenges	.120	.107	.089	1.125	.261
Confidence	-.044	.040	-.045	-1.091	.276

Perception	.270	.102	.205	2.648	.008
Awareness	.289	.095	.214	3.054	.002
Knowledge	.087	.095	.066	.916	.360
a. Dependent Variable: Qualification					

The age profile of the respondents reveals their level of awareness of LD. The majority of the teachers (301) were 31–40 years old, followed by 119 aged 20–30 years, whereas only a small number (29) were between 41–50 years, and one was over 51 years. This indicates that the majority were middle-aged to young, which could have an effect on their knowledge of contemporary pedagogical and special education techniques. Female teachers (341) outnumbered males (109), a trend common in elementary education that could affect teaching and inclusion methods. Experientially, the majority of teachers (203) had 5–10 years, with 185 having less than 5 years, and fewer with 11–15 years (33) or more than 16 years (29), suggesting a high percentage of early to mid-career teachers still gaining experience in managing learning disabilities. Educational levels differed, with 123 possessing a Master's, 87 an M.Ed., 65 a Bachelor's, and 175 other qualifications, which may have influenced their definition of learning disability. Of special interest, 385 teachers reported having special education training, but 65 did not, illustrating pervasive exposure to inclusive education, albeit its applicability remains the most important concern. The research identified that the majority of the respondents taught in government schools (266), with others being private schools (165) and others (19) representing a range of learning environments with differing resources and policies for managing learning disabilities. Teachers taught at different levels, with 132 teaching primary students, 147 secondary, 38 higher secondary, and 133 others, providing a wide cross-section of opinions in different stages of development.

Descriptive analysis emphasizes differences in teachers' awareness, perception, and preparedness in handling learning disabilities even though many of them are trained in special education. Their experience, qualifications, and school settings influence their comprehension and implementation of inclusive strategies. Trained teachers are a plus, but professional development, special workshops, and refresher courses are needed to fill gaps in knowledge. Policy measures must provide standardized, high-quality training to all teachers to promote a more inclusive learning environment. In general, more capacity-building is required to prepare teachers with effective strategies for supporting students with learning disabilities.

The regression equation shows a positive moderate correlation ( $R = 0.520$ ) between the independent variables (Challenges, Confidence, Knowledge, Awareness, and Perception) and the dependent variable (Qualification), where 27% of the variance is explained ( $R^2 = 0.270$ ). The ANOVA findings ( $F = 32.926$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) validate the overall statistical significance of the model. But of the predictors, Perception ( $\beta = 0.205$ ,  $p = 0.008$ ) and Awareness ( $\beta = 0.214$ ,  $p = 0.002$ ) are significant positive influences on Qualification, whereas Challenges ( $p = 0.261$ ), Confidence ( $p = 0.276$ ), and Knowledge ( $p = 0.360$ ) are not statistically momentous. The standard error of the estimate (0.946) indicates a bit of variation in the predictions. Overall, although the model indicates that Perception and Awareness are important variables to influence Qualification, there is a lot of variation that cannot be explained, suggesting further variables need to be investigated.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The research points out that although teachers in elementary schools have a basic understanding of learning disabilities, their capacity to identify and assist such students is poor. The role of teaching experience, previous training, and school environment is most significant in making them ready to handle such issues. Yet, most teachers lack the specialized education needed for the early identification and proper intervention of such students, resulting in opportunities for assistance going unnoticed. This shortfall highlights the need to prepare teachers with the skills required to identify varied learning needs and adopt the right strategies.

To meet these challenges, policy interventions and extensive professional development programs are necessary. Targeted training on learning disabilities will not only improve teachers' competence and confidence but also lead to a more inclusive education system. Policymakers and schools need to work together to incorporate specialized training into teacher education programs and professional development activities. Enhancing these efforts will guarantee that students with LD are provided with the provision they require to succeed academically and socially.

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