



Knowledge and Attitude of Primary School Teachers Towards Inclusive Education of Children with Specific Learning Disabilities

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ABSTRACT: The study titled "A Study on the knowledge and attitude of primary school teachers towards inclusive education of children with specific learning disabilities" intended to determine the level of knowledge of primary school teachers on specific learning disabilities and inclusive education, to assess the attitude of primary school teachers towards inclusive education of children with specific learning disabilities, to study the association of teachers' knowledge and their attitude towards inclusive education with selected professional variables, to compare knowledge and attitude of primary school teachers based on educational sub-districts and teaching section, to find the relationship between knowledge and attitude of primary school teachers towards inclusive education of children with specific learning disabilities. The tools used consists of a questionnaire, to collect demographic and professional profile and to assess teachers' knowledge of specific learning disabilities and inclusive education; and the teachers' attitude towards inclusive education scale (TAIS) to understand the attitude of teachers towards inclusive education. The sample consisted of 180 primary school teachers. The result shows that 63% of participants have an average level of knowledge and 51% of the participants have a positive attitude towards inclusive education of children with specific learning disabilities. The study found out that there is a significant correlation between teachers' knowledge and their attitude towards inclusive education.

Keywords: Primary School Teacher, Inclusive education, Specific learning disabilities, Children



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1. Introduction

All children, irrespective of race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinions, national or social origin, and disability have the right to education. "Inclusive education" means a system of education wherein students with and without disability learn together and the system of teaching and learning is suitably adapted to meet the learning needs of different types of students with disabilities (RPWD act, 2016). It is a system of education which incorporates all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions. The philosophy of inclusive education is about making schools to meet the needs of all students. It aims at providing quality education for normal children and children with special needs under the same roof. Inclusive education is a system of education in which all children from a given community learn together in the same local school including children with specific learning difficulties or other disabilities. It is an attempt to make students with special needs goes to school.

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with their friends to receive individualized instruction and support for their success. Inclusive education is a model for promoting social acceptance for children with disability.

As per International classification of diseases, 10th version (ICD-10, WHO, 1992) Specific Developmental Disorders of Scholastic Skills (SDDSS) refer to those conditions where patterns of scholastic skills acquisition are disturbed since early stages of development in spite of adequate opportunity to learn and in the absence of brain trauma. The term SDDSS is used interchangeably with the term 'Specific Learning Disability' (SLD).

2. Inclusive education of children with Specific Learning Disabilities

The number of children identified with specific learning disabilities has been increased dramatically in recent years. Among children with disabilities, specific learning disabilities often remain undiagnosed, misunderstood. There are significant confusion and disagreement, not just on the part of the general public but among professionals and parents as well, on such fundamental questions as, what is a specific learning disability? And how should students with specific learning disabilities to be taught?

Rights of persons with disability act 2016, state-specific learning disability as a disability and describes the measures to facilitate inclusive education. It is mentioned in chapter three that educational institutions should provide inclusive education to detect specific learning disabilities in children at the earliest and take suitable pedagogical and other measures to overcome them. It also has the provisions to establish adequate number of teacher training institutions, to train professionals and staff to support inclusive education at all levels of school education, to establish sufficient number of resource centers to support educational institutions at all levels of school education, to make appropriate modifications in the curriculum as well as examination system to meet the needs of students with special needs such as additional time for completion of examination paper, facility of scribe or amanuensis, exemption from second and third language courses.

The students with specific learning disabilities could perform better academically if supported by the teachers in acquiring skills of reading, comprehension, writing, and spelling. Many theorists emphasized the need for inclusive education for students with specific learning disabilities. These schools could be prepared to accept the challenge and provide appropriate programs.

Mani and Mulhariah (2003) explained on creating effective classrooms through cooperative learning whereas according to Malhotra (2003) teachers should be provided flexible syllabi, which would give them more time and freedom.

4. Role of teachers in Inclusive education

Teachers are viewed as the primary worker to practice the ideology of inclusive education in the field of general education. The most important condition for successful inclusion of students with specific learning disabilities in the regular classroom is a change from negative to positive attitudes of regular school teachers towards children with specific learning disabilities and their

inclusion in regular classrooms. One of the main factors influencing the successful implementation of an inclusive policy is the positive attitude of teachers (Shade and Stewart, 2001).

Various studies have suggested that teachers' attitudes towards inclusion depend on many factors

5. Teaching experience: Several studies cite teaching experience as influencing teachers' attitudes. Clough & Lindsay (1991) identified that younger teachers and those with fewer years of experience were more supportive of inclusion.

6. Teachers' training: Teacher training is another important factor which influences the attitude of teachers towards inclusion. This means the teachers' knowledge about children with special education needs and is attained through formal education during pre-service and in-service training. According to O'Brian & Ryba (2005), without a sound plan for teacher training in the academic needs of children with special needs, efforts to include these children in general classrooms would be difficult.

7. Educational Environment Janney et al. (1995) found that environmental support such as the availability of appropriate teaching materials and smaller classes generate positive teacher attitudes towards inclusive educational practices.

8. Methodology

8.1 Objectives

- To determine the level of knowledge of primary school teachers on specific learning disabilities and inclusive education
- To assess the attitude of primary school teachers towards inclusive education of children with specific learning disabilities
- To study the association of teachers' knowledge and attitude on inclusive education of children with specific learning disabilities with selected professional variables
- To find the relationship between teachers' knowledge and their attitude towards inclusive education of children with specific learning disabilities

8.2 Hypothesis

- There is a significant association between teachers' experience in learning about specific learning disabilities and knowledge level
- Teachers who have better knowledge will have a positive attitude

8.3 Design of the study

The present study is a descriptive survey study which studies the knowledge and attitude of primary school teachers towards inclusive education of children with specific learning disabilities in Kozhikode district.

Stage I: Selection of educational sub-districts: At the first stage of sampling, two educational sub-districts under Calicut educational district were selected purposively by their geographical location (Urban and Rural)

Stage II: Selection of Schools: At the second level of sampling, three government and three private aided schools were taken randomly by lottery method from each educational sub-district. Thus, twelve schools were selected at the II stage.

Stage III: Selection of Teachers: Finally, all the teachers from the twelve schools were selected through a survey method by their availability and willingness to cooperate. Hence, 180 teachers finally constituted the sample for the study.

8.4 Inclusion criteria

- Teachers who were teaching in government and private aided primary schools under Kozhikode city and Kozhikode rural educational subdistricts
- Teachers who were teaching subjects such as English, Malayalam, Hindi, Mathematics, environmental science, social science, science

8.5 Exclusion criteria

- Teachers who were teaching subjects other than English, Malayalam, Hindi, Mathematics, environmental science, social science, science
- Teachers who were not teaching in government and private primary schools under Kozhikode city and Kozhikode rural educational subdistricts
- Teachers who were not willing to participate in the study

8.6 Tools for data collection

8.6.1 Questionnaire

The self-prepared questionnaire consisted of two parts

Part: 1 Demographic and professional profile of respondents

The researcher prepared questionnaire to elicit personal and professional data profile of the respondents. It covered data about teachers' age, sex, marital status, educational and occupational details, workshops or training attended in the field of specific learning disabilities or inclusive education of children with specific learning disabilities

Part: 2 Teachers' knowledge of specific learning disabilities and inclusive education

The second part of the questionnaire consisted of closed-ended questions which assessed the knowledge of primary school teachers about specific learning disabilities- its meaning, causes, types, and knowledge of the inclusive education program.

The self-prepared questionnaire was face validated by a psychologist, special educator, and social worker before administration.

8.6.2 Teachers' attitude towards inclusive education scale (TAIS)

A modified and translated version of teachers' attitude towards inclusive education scale (TAIS) was utilized to assess the attitude of primary school teachers towards inclusive education for children with specific learning disabilities.

Adaptations to the ORMS have been made, and the language modified according to current inclusion terminology, as well as by adopting American spellings and wording. The TAIS includes four sections, each of which is scored using an eight-point scale.

Section four consists of statements which assess attitude towards the inclusion of the respondents. This section comprises a 30-item questionnaire designed to measure teachers' general attitudes toward including SEN children and young people within mainstream schools. Teachers rate their agreement with each statement ranging from strongly agree to disagree strongly.

8.7 Statistical Analysis

The data collected were analyzed using the computerized program of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Frequency distributions, percentage analysis, mean and standard deviation were the descriptive statistics that were used. Chi-square test was used to find out the association of knowledge and attitude with selected professional variables. The Independent t-test was used to find out significant differences between the means of variables and the correlation coefficient was used to determine the significant relationship between knowledge and attitude.

8.8 Ethical issues

The data collection was carried out with the written informed consent of the respondents. The purpose and outcome of the study were explained to the respondents. The queries of the teachers were addressed before the data collection. The anonymity of the respondents and the strict confidentiality concerning all information collected was maintained, and the information provided by them was used only for the research purpose.

9. Results

9.1 Distribution of respondents based on the educational subdistrict

In the study, 44% (80 participants) of the respondents were recruited from urban educational, and 56% of the respondents (100 participants) were recruited from rural educational sub-district.

9.2 Distribution of the respondents based on their professional profile

Professional details	Category	Frequency	Percent
Teaching experience (in years)	1- 5	38	21.1
	5- 10	29	16.1
	10- 15	25	13.9
	15- 20	26	14.4
	20-25	19	10.6
	25- 30	29	16.1
	30 and above	14	7.8
Teaching section	LP	90	50.0
	UP	90	50.0

9.3 Distribution of respondents based on their exposure to the topic of specific learning disabilities

Professional exposure	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Exposure as part of the curriculum	Yes	90	50
	No	90	50
Training/seminar attendance	Yes	117	65
	No	63	35
Exposure to literature	Yes	145	80.6
	No	35	19.4
Identification experience	Yes	160	88.9
	No	20	11.1
Area identified*	Reading	16	8.9
	Mathematics calculations	3	1.7
	Writing	27	15
	Identified in more than one area	114	63.9
Experience in teaching SLD children	Yes	163	90.6
	No	17	9.4

*10.9% of the respondents were not applicable for the question as they were not identified any students with specific learning disabilities.

9.4 Overall knowledge (Knowledge of specific learning disabilities and inclusive education)

63% of the respondents had an average level of knowledge on specific learning disabilities and inclusive education, while 20% had a low level of knowledge and 17% of the respondents had a high level of knowledge.

Hence it is concluded that the teacher participants had an average level of knowledge on specific learning disabilities and inclusive education.

9.5 Attitude of primary school teachers towards inclusive education of children with specific learning disabilities

51% of the respondents had a positive attitude whereas 49.4% of the respondents had a negative attitude towards inclusive education of children with specific learning disabilities. There is no significant percentage wise difference in the positive and negative attitudes.

9.6 Association between knowledge and selected professional variables

The professional variables selected for testing association with level of knowledge were teaching experience, exposure as part of the curriculum, exposure to literature, attendance in training/ workshops, SLD identification experience and experience in teaching children with SLD.

Variables	Category	Low	Average	High	Chi sq	df	P
Exposure as part of the curriculum	Yes	12	53	25	17.9	2	.001**
	No	24	61	5			
SLD identification experience	Yes	28	103	29	6.6	2	.04*
	No	8	11	1			

It is inferred that teachers' knowledge has a statistically significant association with

- i) Exposure as part of curriculum and level of knowledge
- ii) Experience in identifying children with SLD and level of knowledge

9.7 Relationship between teachers' overall knowledge and attitude

List of variables	Knowledge (SLD, IE)	Attitude
Knowledge (SLD, IE)	1	.169*
Sig. (2-tailed)		0.024
Attitude	.169*	1
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.024	

10. Discussion

The descriptive analyses indicated that teachers involved in this study possess an average level of knowledge on inclusive education of children with specific learning disabilities. According to Williams, et al., (2013) school teachers have less knowledge about the signs and symptoms and intervention for children with specific learning disabilities. Lack of trained personnel has consistently been one of the many obstacles to the provision of services to children with disabilities in India. (Saravanabhavan & Saravanabhavan, 2010).

The attitude of primary school teachers towards inclusive education of children with specific learning disabilities was assessed by using an eight-point TAIS scale (Teacher Attitude to Inclusion Scale). 51% of the respondents possessed a positive attitude whereas 49.4% of the respondents possessed a negative attitude towards inclusive education of children with specific learning disabilities.

The results are drawn out from various studies conducted to identify the attitude of teachers towards inclusive education varies. Majority of the instructors in school have a moderate positive attitude towards inclusive education. There is some evidence that a significant predictor of successful inclusion of students with disabilities in the normal classroom is the positive attitude of teachers. Research evidence also suggests that a positive teacher attitude towards inclusion often begins during pre-service teacher education.

The chi-square test for association reveals that the teachers who had studied about specific learning disabilities in their curriculum had a high level of knowledge as compared to other teacher participants. The teachers who had experience in identifying children with specific learning disabilities had better knowledge. There was a significant positive correlation between teachers'

overall knowledge regarding inclusive education and attitude.

A study by Kamala & Ramganesh, (2013) depicts the teachers have an average level of knowledge about specific learning disabilities, and this is not related to their teaching experience. The authors suggested that this might be because they were not adequately trained to instruct the children with special needs in an inclusive school.

In a study by Shari & Vranda, (2015), they found that most of the teachers had a positive attitude towards specific learning disabilities. However, regular classroom teachers had less knowledge and attitude towards inclusive education of children with learning disabilities. Specific Learning Disabilities can be recognized in 3 to 4 years of age when children start their preschool education, and there is a need to sensitize teachers on how to screen or at least how to differentiate Specific Learning Disabilities from other issues of learning. Hence the study emphasizes that there is a need for creating awareness to modify the attitude towards inclusion and bringing children with specific learning disabilities into the mainstream with other children.

11. Conclusion

The current study among primary school teachers emphasizes their knowledge and attitude towards inclusive education of children with specific learning disabilities. The study identified that the teachers possess an average level of knowledge on specific learning disabilities and inclusive education and they have a positive attitude towards inclusive education of children with specific learning disabilities. The study shows that teachers lack adequate knowledge on the educational provisions of children with specific learning disabilities and this lead to unawareness and inaccessibility of such benefits by the school going children with specific learning disabilities. The teachers who studied about specific learning disabilities in their curriculum of teacher training programme have better knowledge, and there is a positive relationship between knowledge and attitude of primary school teachers.

12. Implications of the study

Implications of the present study focus on providing suggestions or recommendations to the teachers, administrators, professionals, educational planners and policymakers for making positive changes in some areas that can help in successful implementation of inclusive education.

- The study supports the need for early recognition, diagnosis of specific learning disabilities, and early intervention for the better academic outcome of the children with specific learning disabilities.
- School awareness programmes can be conducted through which teachers will have a better understanding of children with specific learning disabilities.
- Appropriate action must be taken to include all regular school teachers in teacher training programs, and the teacher training programmes can be organized every month according to the training needs of the teachers.
- A social worker can take the role of advocate to influence educational planners and policy makers to incorporate practical and effective instructional techniques into teacher preparation programs.

- A recommendation can be given to the teacher training department to incorporate the concept of inclusive education as part of the curriculum. So that the trainee teachers get opportunities to work in inclusive classrooms and to observe teaching children with specific learning disabilities in an inclusive setting.
- Social workers can disseminate information on rights, opportunities, educational provisions, need for remedial education for children with specific learning disabilities.
- An evaluation for specific learning disabilities should be done in the school level for all children presenting with learning problems and help them to attain a certificate from a psychologist to avail education concessions.

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