

ABSTRACT

Learning Disabilities (LD) are a complex group of neurological disorders that affect various cognitive functions, including listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning, and math. Often termed a hidden disability, LD is prevalent in India, with approximately five children in every classroom affected. However, due to a lack of awareness, many cases remain unidentified. Teachers, being key players in early detection, often lack the necessary knowledge and training. The need for a standardised, accessible, handy and user-friendly assessment scale for primary school teachers is critical for early identification and intervention, preventing academic difficulties and social exclusion among affected children. The primary objective of this study was to develop an assessment scale for primary school teachers to identify children with Learning Disabilities. Secondary objectives included assessing the Knowledge, Attitude, and Practice (KAP) of teachers regarding LD, studying the socio-demographic determinants of KAP, conducting a Sensitisation Programme, and evaluating its impact on KAP.

A cross-sectional research design was employed, with purposive sampling targeting primary school teachers from rural and urban parts of Coimbatore jurisdiction, Tamil Nadu. The assessment scale's development initially involved an extensive literature review and expert validation. The scale consisted of 104 statements. These statements were integrated into a 5-point Likert scale designed to aid in the identification of specific learning disabilities. The developed scale underwent rigorous validation procedures, including face validity and content validity assessments by a panel of nine experts. Incorporating the suggestions and opinions of these experts, the assessment scale was refined, resulting in a total of 96 items. The Teacher's Knowledge Scale on Learning Disability, the Attitude Scale for primary school teachers towards Learning Disability, and the Checklist on Teaching Practices of primary school teachers were developed and also underwent rigorous assessments for both face and content validity. The knowledge scale comprised 57 items, the attitude scale consisted of 35 items and the practices checklist contained 24 items. Subsequently, the tool was deployed in a pilot study involving 133 samples. The data collected from the pilot study underwent thorough analysis, including the application of Cronbach's Alpha test for tool reliability. The results of Cronbach's

alpha analysis provided conclusive evidence of the reliability and robustness of the developed scale.

The actual study started with responses from 514 teachers who were considered for the standardisation of the assessment scale. During data collection, the tools were administered with clear instructions. The data was scored and consolidated according to developed scoring norms. KAP of teachers on learning disability was analysed and a sensitisation programme was designed and implemented, grounded in Gagne's Conditions of Learning Theory. The programme consisted of 12 one-hour sessions over six weeks, targeting 53 teachers. Data collected before, after, and during the follow-up of the sensitisation programme was done to find the effectiveness.

The standardisation procedures encompassed various validity and reliability tests. Further factor analysis using PCA reduced the items to 48. Exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis results were as follows: KMO Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy = .959, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity significant at 1% level, with a total variance explained at 65.58%. Confirmatory factor analysis using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) indicated a good model fit, with values like CFI= 0.90 and RMSEA= .062 in the acceptable range. Cronbach's Alpha test showed excellent reliability, with a value of 0.972 overall. Test-retest reliability showed Pearson correlation at 0.703, and inter-rater reliability (IRR) was 73.3%. Sensitivity and Specificity were at 91.3% and 96.83%, respectively, with a Kappa coefficient of 0.862. KAP analysis revealed that 13.4% of primary school teachers exhibited high knowledge, 33.7% of teachers demonstrated a favourable attitude and 39.1% of teachers employed good/satisfactory teaching practices regarding learning disabilities. A positive correlation was found between teachers' knowledge, attitude, and practice regarding LD.

Looking at the influence of Socio-Demographic markers on KAP. Higher knowledge levels were associated with older age groups (51-60 years), married teachers, those with more children, teachers with over 15 years of experience, ICSE board schools, private schools, joint families, and those with child development/psychology in their curriculum. Regarding attitude, favourable attitudes were seen in older teachers (51-60 years), married teachers, those with more children, teachers with over 15 years of experience, diploma/teacher training qualifications, ICSE board schools, private schools,

and those with child development/psychology in the curriculum. Good/satisfactory teaching practices were associated with older age groups (51-60 years), married and widowed teachers, those with children, teachers with over 15 years of experience, ICSE board schools, private schools, and those with child development/psychology in their curriculum. The Sensitisation Programme significantly improved teachers' knowledge from a moderate level (mean score: 34.47) to a higher level (mean scores: 39.62 and 40.87 in follow-up). Attitudes remained neutral with no significant change (mean scores: 84.82 before, 83.15 after, and 82.98 in follow-up). Practices improved from an average level (mean score: 18.96) to satisfactory/good levels (mean scores: 19.42 and 19.87 in follow-up).

The study underscores the need for a standardised assessment scale for primary school teachers to identify LD and targeted sensitisation programmes to enhance teachers' capacity to identify and address LD effectively in primary schools. Socio-demographic markers play a significant role in shaping teachers' KAP, and sensitisation can lead to notable improvements in knowledge and practices.

The study emphasised the importance of continuous professional development, and comprehensive support systems, including the involvement of school counsellors. Furthermore, implications for central and state governments, educational institutions, teachers, parents, and future research were explored. The findings advocate for the integration of specialised modules on LD in teacher training programs and highlight the role of parents in collaborating with educators to create supportive learning environments. This research concludes that ongoing advancements in policy, technology, and regional adaptations are essential to enhance the effectiveness of LD identification and intervention strategies.

Keywords: Learning Disabilities, Primary School Teachers, Assessment Scale, Knowledge, Attitude, Practice, Sensitisation Programme, Socio-Demographic markers.