



Learning Difficulties: Teachers' Perceptions and Practices at Elementary Level

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Abstract- The study aims to investigate teachers' perception and practices regarding learning difficulties at elementary level. Quasi experimental research design was used for the study. Elementary school teachers in district Khushab were considered the population of this study. Multi stage sampling technique was used to select the sample. At stage one convenient sampling technique was used to select Urban and Rural Schools. At stage two male and female schools were also selected through convenient sampling technique. At stage three intact groups of teachers teaching at elementary level were taken to conduct experiment.

The result of the study revealed that the teachers had insufficient awareness regarding students learning difficulties but was enhanced after session. They believe that the students are facing much difficulties in psychomotor domain like reading, writing, memorizing spellings due to the minor learning difficulties like dyslexia, dyspraxia and autism.

Key words: Learning Difficulties, Teachers, Perceptions, Practices, Elementary Level

I. INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

In education system two terms are used interchangeably, first is Learning Disability and the second term is Learning Difficulty. In every context educators are not able to differentiate between these terms and students having the academic learning difficulties are considered under learning disability (Larkin, & Ellis, 2004). The term learning disability is described as the severe learning problems often with no explanation, whereas "learning difficulty" as a need of additional assistance to learn school curriculum (Louden et al., 2000; Rivalland, 2000; Watson & Boman, 2005). Much complication arises in the identification process by the interchangeability of these two terms (Rivalland, 2000).

Barnett, and Henderson, (2001) believe that the learning disability arises from the malfunctioning of brain processing of language, visual, auditory and kinesthetic information (Valmo, 2013). Students face difficulties in understanding and clarifying different concepts and terms and may face problems in the cognitive functions like:

- 1) Storage and retrieval of Short term memory
- 2) Sequencing and recalling of information
- 3) Memory related to direction
- 4) Perception related to vision and auditory, for
- 5) Motor functioning. (Hammond, 1996)

Learning Disability means the loss in development of organizational skill, such as in completing tasks, collection of the resources required in the completion of task, in managing time, meeting deadlines, and arranging the class etc (McMullen, Shippen, & Dangel, 2007). Bellert and Graham (2006) state that it results automatically in failing to apply the basic academic skills, therefore focusing on just higher order skills is not an option for those students (Berninger, 2000). Erikson identifies formation as a core psychosocial conflict in the development of learner's personality, connected with the problems of learning disability (Klassen & Lynch, 2007; Talukdar, 2012). Learning disability has a significant impact on learner's social and emotional growth (Bellert & Graham).

Brookes, (2005) Highlights the consequences for students facing learning disability. He demonstrated that the students facing learning disabilities usually withdraw themselves from the class participation and face

cognitive hindrances in asking questions and in creating, relating and expressing those ideas in classroom (Cicerchia, 2016; Smith, 2017; Creswell, 2008). Such learners are not willing for class participation, especially in verbal responses. Involvement of students having LD with less participation in extracurricular activities may feel isolated even from peers (Larkin & Ellis, 2004).

Teacher's perceptions and expectations have strong effect in improvement of such students' academic performance (Chista & Mpofu, 2016; Soltau, 2015). Students with special needs are imagined to be the unproductive part of society. This common perception is carried out by the society, experts and the educators are negatively impacting the students with special needs (Fakolade, et al., 2009; Rose, 2009). While teaching, teachers' perceptions have a great impact on students' academic performance. Hayes (2000) defines the perception as the individuals prevailing tendency to respond fairly or unfairly to an object and it could be a person or a group of people (Larkin & Ellis, 2004). Within this context the perception refers to the fair and unfair beliefs of teachers towards the learner which influence the learners' academic performance (Creswell, 2008). Miller (2001) elaborates teachers' expectations as the presuppositions made by the teachers about the students' academic achievement (Bellert & Graham, 2006). Thus, the expectations of teachers involve the presuppositions made by the teacher regarding students' performance (how much students will achieve academic success) within the specified time period (Watson & Boman, 2005). Such predictions have significant positive or negative impact on students' academic performance (Crosland, & Dunlap, 2012).

Additionally, the equitable resources and their allocation, has a strong impact on teachers' confidence and the future performance of students having learning disability in secondary schools (Evans, (2016). During classroom interaction, teachers have a perception about students' behavior (Haralambos and Holborn, 2008). The teacher expresses attitudes about the learners having learning disabilities (Yara, 2009; Everatt, et al., 2007; Hinnant, Brien & Ghazzarian, 2009; Flynn, 2013).

Statement of the Problem

As teachers are the pivots of whole education system, if they are unaware of the learning problems faced by students in their classrooms then how an effective teaching learning process can occur. This study therefore explores the relationship between teacher's perceptions, practices and the performance of students with learning difficulties.

Objectives of the Study

The study aims to:

1. Explore teachers' perceptions regarding Students' learning difficulties
2. Determine teachers' classroom practices with special reference to students' learning difficulties.
3. Assess teachers' perceptions and practices on the basis of demographic variables like locale and gender, with special reference to learning difficulties.

Hypotheses

- No significant difference will be found in teachers perceptions and practices with reference to students learning difficulties.
- No significant difference will be found in teachers perceptions and practices on the basis of demographic variables like locale and gender, with reference to students learning difficulties.
- No significant difference will be found in teachers perceptions and practices on pre and post test results with reference to students learning difficulties.
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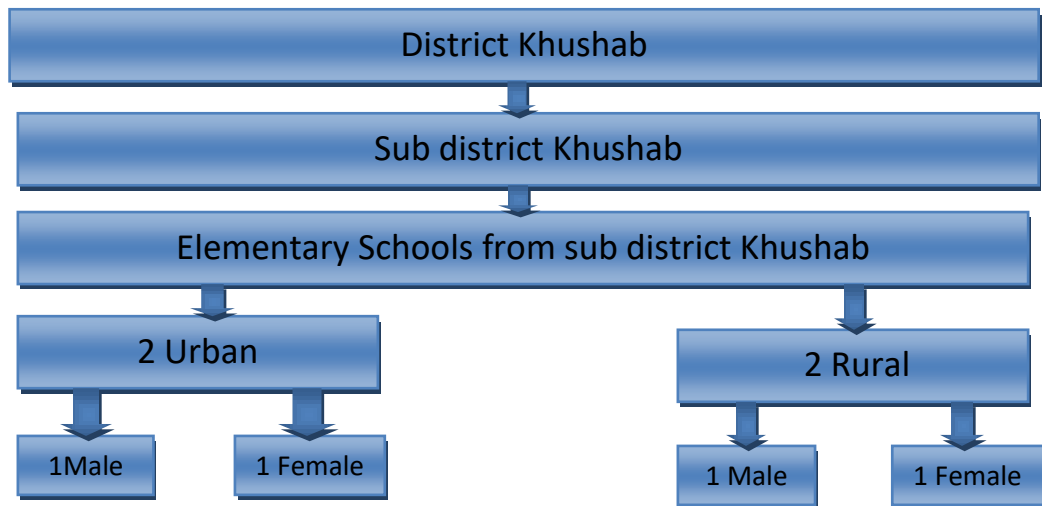
II. RESEARCH METHOD

Quasi experimental research design was used for the study. Quasi-experimental design involves selecting groups, upon which a variable is tested, without any random pre-selection processes.

For example, to perform an educational experiment, a class might be arbitrarily divided by alphabetical selection or by seating arrangement. The division is often convenient.

Elementary school teachers in district Khushab were considered the population of this study. Multi stage sampling technique was used to select the sample.

1. At stage one convenient sampling technique was used to select Urban and Rural Schools in District Khushab.
2. At stage two male and female schools were also selected through convenient sampling technique.
3. At stage three intact groups of teachers teaching at elementary level were taken to conduct experiment.



Experiment: process and Procedure

As mentioned above this is a quasi experimental research with pre and post test so the questionnaire was administered among participants prior to conduct experiment. After pre test 10 weeks awareness workshop was designed to perform experiment. The participants were from different locale and gender so a common place was required for class and to fulfill the purpose the space and resources of Alfauz International College for Girls Jauharabd were used with the permission of college administration. Presentations were developed on the three constructs like autism, dyslexia and dyspraxia. Saturday was selected as a workshop day. Two hours workshops were held on every Saturday. At the end of 10 weeks workshop scale was again administered among participants.

Research Instrument

Self reported 5 point likert type scale was used to investigate teachers’ perceptions and practices regarding students learning difficulties at elementary level with special reference to autism, dyslexia and dyspraxia.

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed by applying descriptive and inferential statistics according to the nature of data.

1. Paired sample t test was applied to find out the difference between pre and post test.
2. Independent sample t test was applied separately on pre and post to find the difference on the scale according to different demographical variables like urban and rural, male and female etc.

III. RESULTS

Table 1

Paired sample t test on scale (Pre and Post)

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	T	Sig.
Pair 1	totalq1	1.10002	34	12.52634	-1.596	.000
	totalq2	1.10852	34	12.13842		

Table 1 exhibit the results of paired sample t test and the significance value shows that there is a significant difference between pre and post awareness test results because the value is smaller than .05.

Table 2

Independent sample t test to find out the difference in opinion between groups on the basis of gender on factors (Pre Test)

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	sig	t	df
Factor 1	Male	18	37.7647	5.96374	.476	.794	32

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	sig	t	df
Factor 1	Male	18	37.7647	5.96374	.476	.794	32
	Female	16	35.9375	7.22467		.790	29.164
Factor 2	Male	18	49.2941	6.56472	.484	.017	32
	Female	16	49.2500	7.99583		.017	29.092
Factor 3	Male	18	26.1765	5.45705	.186	-.348	32
	Female	16	26.7500	3.82099		-.351	28.703
Factor 4	Male	18	63.1176	10.63533	.493	-.541	32
	Female	16	65.0625	9.97643		-.542	31.000
Total Scale	Male	18	1.10532	10.58370	.476	.215	32
	Female	16	1.09562	14.99764		.213	26.831

Table No. 2 depicts that the number of male and female teachers participated in the study was 18 male and 16 female, their Mean (i.e. 37.7647 of male and 35.9375 of female), Standard Deviation (i.e. 5.96374 of male and 7.22467 of female). The above table also depicts the degree of freedom 29.164 and significance value is .476 (i.e. .005) which shows that there is no significant difference because the significance value is greater than 0.05.

For factor 2 their Mean is (i.e. 49.2941 of male and 49.2500 of female), Standard Deviation (i.e. 6.56472 of male and 7.99583 of female). The above table also depicts the degree of freedom 29.164, t value for both male and female is .017 and significance value is .484 which is greater than 0.05 so it can be said that no significant difference exists between the groups.

It also presents the results related to difference in opinion between groups on the basis of gender on factor 3 and it is apparent that there is no significant difference between groups because the significant value (.186) is greater than .05

The table indicates that for factor 4 mean scores of male and female respondents are 63.1176, 65.0625 respectively, standard deviation is (10.63533, 9.97643) and t significant value is .493 which is greater than .05 so no significant difference exists between the groups.

For total scale their Mean is 1.10532 of male and 1.09562 of female, Standard Deviation (i.e. 10.58370 of male and 14.99764 of female). The above table also depicts the degree of freedom 26.831, t value for both male and female is .017 and significance value is .476 which is greater than 0.05 so it can be said that no significant difference exists between the groups.

Table 3

Independent sample t test to find out the difference in opinion between groups on the basis of Locale on Factors (Pre Test)

	Locale	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig.	t	Df
Factor 1	Urban	21	38.0476	6.46897	.899	1.240	32
	Rural	13	35.2308	6.37905		1.245	25.855
Factor 2	Urban	21	49.2381	7.65444	.530	.153	32
	Rural	13	48.8462	6.54276		.159	28.621
Factor 3	Urban	21	26.8571	4.67211	.856	.617	32
	Rural	13	25.8462	4.59794		.619	25.895
Factor 4	Urban	21	64.3810	9.60456	.474	.213	32
	Rural	13	63.6154	11.12459		.205	22.726
Total Scale	Urban	21	1.11622	12.86264	.840	.957	32
	Rural	13	1.07382	11.98985		.973	26.975

The table 3 presents the results related to difference in opinion between groups on the bases of locale on factors on pre test and it is clear that there is no significant difference between groups because the significant value of factor 1 (.899) is greater than .05

For factor 2 Mean is (i.e. 49.2381 of urban and 48.8462 of rural), Standard Deviation (i.e. 7.65444 of urban and 6.54276 of rural). The significance value is .530 which indicates no significant difference because the significance value is greater than 0.05. it is clear that there is no significant difference between groups on factor 3 because the significant value (.856) is greater than .05. The mean scores of urban and rural respondents for factor 4 are 64.3810, 63.6154 respectively, standard deviation is (9.60456, 11.12459) and t significant value is .474 which is greater than .05 so no significant difference exists between the groups on factor 4. On total Scale the Mean 1.11622 is for urban and 1.07382 for rural respondents. Standard Deviation 7.65444 is of urban and 6.54276 of rural. The significance value is .840 which indicates no significant difference because the value is greater than 0.05.

Table 4

Independent sample t test to find out the difference in opinion between groups on the basis of gender on factor 1 (Post Test)

	Gender	N	Mean	St.D.	Sig.	T	Df.
Factor 1	Male	18	44.2353	6.31001	.911	.358	32
	Female	16	43.5000	5.40370		.360	30.740
Factor 2	Male	18	55.4706	6.53947	.231	-.439	32
	Female	16	56.5625	7.74570		-.436	29.451
Factor 3	Male	18	37.0000	5.68990	.767	-1.986	32
	Female	16	40.5625	4.50139		-2.001	30.139
Factor 4	Male	18	89.3529	6.53779	.556	-1.650	32
	Female	16	93.5000	7.87401		-1.641	29.240
Total Scale	Male	18	1.1206E2	9.72414	.313	.532	31
	Female	16	1.0975E2	14.82565		.526	25.662

Table No. 4 depicts the number of male and female teachers participated in the study (i.e. 18 male and 16 female), their Mean (i.e. 44.2353 of male and 43.5000 of female), and Standard Deviation (i.e. 6.31001 of male and 5.40370 of female). The above table also depicts that the significance value is .476 (i.e. .005) which shows no significant difference between groups because the significance value is greater than 0.05.

For factor 2 the Mean is 55.4706 of male and 56.5625 of female, Standard Deviation is 6.53947 for male and 7.74570 for female. The above table also depicts the degree of freedom 29.451, and significance value is .231 which is greater than 0.05 so it can be said that no significant difference exists between the groups. On factor 3 and it is apparent that there is no significant difference between groups because the significant value (.767) is greater than .05. No significant difference was also found on factor 4 and total scale because the significance values are .556 and .313 respectively which are greater than .05.

Table 5

Independent sample t test to find out the difference in opinion between groups on the basis of Locale on Factor 1 (Post Test)

	Locale	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig.	t	Df
Factor 1	Urban	21	45.4286	4.64297	.739	2.058	32
	Rural	13	41.4615	6.60322		1.895	19.380
Factor 2	Urban	21	56.9048	6.74466	.347	1.227	32
	Rural	13	53.8462	7.57018		1.193	23.313
Factor 3	Urban	21	37.0952	5.62943	.576	-1.797	32
	Rural	13	40.5385	5.07634		-1.843	27.621
Factor 4	Urban	21	89.8095	7.82700	.872	-.908	32

	Locale	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig.	t	Df
Factor 1	Urban	21	45.4286	4.64297	.739	2.058	32
	Rural	13	92.3846	8.37196		-.893	24.241
Total Scale	Urban	21	1.1286E2	12.20773	.943	1.233	32
	Rural	13	1.0762E2	11.76533		1.244	26.313

The table 5 presents the results related to difference in opinion between groups on the bases of locale on factors on post test and it is clear that there is no significant difference between groups because the significant value of factor 1(.739) is greater than .05

For factor 2 Mean is (i.e. 56.9048 of urban and 53.8462 of rural), Standard Deviation (i.e. of urban 6.74466 and 7.57018 of rural). The significance value is .347 which indicates no significant difference because the significance value is greater than 0.05. it is clear that there is no significant difference between groups on factor 3 because the significant value (.576) is greater than .05. The mean scores of urban and rural respondents for factor 4 are 89.8095, 92.3846 respectively, standard deviation is (9.60456, 11.12459) and t significant value is .474 which is greater than .05 so no significant difference exists between the groups on factor 4. On total Scale the Mean 1.11622 is for urban and 1.07382 for rural respondents. Standard Deviation 7.82700 is of urban and 8.37196 of rural. The significance value is .872 which indicates no significant difference because the value is greater than 0.05. The significant value on total scale is .943 which is greater than .05 so significant difference in opinion on the basis of locale is not observed.

IV. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The study was conducted to investigate teachers' perception and practices regarding learning difficulties at elementary level. The result of the study revealed that the teachers had insufficient awareness regarding students learning difficulties but was enhanced after session. They believe that the students are facing many difficulties in psychomotor domain like reading, writing, memorizing spellings due to the minor learning difficulties like dyslexia, dyspraxia and autism.

The results of the study were supported by the study associated to the investigation of strategies to deal dyslexic students by Rebecca Elias (2014), positive attitude is shown by the teachers on dyslexia. The results of another research conducted by Aladwani, et al., (2012) assert that Kuwaiti teachers are also aware about dyslexia. Kuwaiti dyslexia association (KDA) conducted a survey in 2004 and reached to the conclusion that most of the primary school students are suffering with dyslexia.

The result of the study supported the argument cited in an article related to investigation of strategies used to deal dyslexic students and explored that mostly teachers faced academic and behavioral challenges with dyslexic students (Peterson, & Pennington, 2012). In most cases teachers faced difficulties in specific learning areas like speaking, writing, reading, arithmetic etc in the class learning activities (Green, et al., 2005; Lucy, 2009; Karande, et al., 2009; McMullen, et al., 2007; Hayes, 2000; Karande et al., 2009; Kataoka et al., 2004; Kirk, 2003). Chitsa and Mpofu (2016) conducted a research on teachers, teaching at elementary level and said, "Teachers have insufficient knowledge about the coping strategies of dyslexic students and lack of training also causes the difficulties in dealing with students having dyslexic issues in classroom situations." The study related to teachers' awareness regarding dyslexia also supports the results of current study.

Barnett and Henderson (2001) conducted a research on teachers' awareness towards the term dyspraxia and said, "The educational professionals of UK were well aware of the term dyspraxia, who pointed that 61 percent of respondents successfully gave the exact definition of the term 'dyspraxia'." On the contrary, the results of this study indicated that teachers had sufficient knowledge about the affects of dyspraxia on the planning of movements and coordination of the child. Wilson (2009) pointed out, "Dyspraxia is caused when a brain don't convey messages to the body properly." The results declared that respondents have adequate understanding about the cause of dyspraxia that it occurs as a result when brain messages are not accurately transmitted to the body of the children (Kooij, 2013; Cicerchia, 2016; Nordqvist, 2016). According to Miller et al (2001) "Although the difficulties faced by students having dyspraxia, in classroom are readily observable, still they remain undiagnosed unless academic failure occurs to them." The special education teachers and classroom teachers both are most often the initial source for the identification of dyspraxics when they notice some sort of poor skill development affecting academic performance (Wright & Sugden, 1998; Kumar, 2011; Green et al., 2005, Piek & Edwards, 1997; Long, et al., 2007). This shows that teachers of mainstream are

well aware of dyspraxia symptoms and it will provide a chance to students having dyspraxia students to outshine rather than to get pushed back.

Kirby (1999) claimed, "It is difficult to identify the true symptoms of dyspraxia because of its overlapping properties with other learning difficulties." On the basis of findings it is recommended that:

- In service training should be provided to teachers to fulfill the needs of students with learning difficulties.
- Training programs and workshops/seminars must be arranged by the school management
- Different strategies as recommended by researches must be implemented by teachers on daily basis

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