

# Learning Disabilities (LD) in Primary Schools and their Awareness Among Mainstream Female Teachers

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## ABSTRACT

**OBJECTIVE:** To identify the level of awareness of learning disabilities among mainstream female teachers in Islamabad and to differentiate the level in view of human age and teaching experience.

**STUDY DESIGN:** A descriptive study

**PLACE AND DURATION:** The study was conducted on 28 federal government public female schools in urban sector of Islamabad from 29<sup>th</sup> September 2011 to 31<sup>st</sup> Oct 2011.

**METHODOLOGY:** The research was survey of 74 primary school female teachers. A multiple choice questionnaire (MCQ) of learning disabilities was used to know the level of awareness about learning disabilities. Data was analyzed on average / percentage. Prior permission was sought to conduct this field study.

**RESULTS:** Results indicated that most of mainstream teachers were with average level of awareness. There was a significant difference in awareness level of teachers in view of age and experience. Novice teachers were having better awareness than those of older ages.

**CONCLUSION:** It was concluded that most of female teachers were not well aware of concept, types and effects of learning disabilities while teaching school children. They also differed in awareness in view of age and experience.

**KEYWORDS:** awareness, dyslexia, learning disabilities, bio-chemical, early intervention, genetic

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## INTRODUCTION

Learning disability is called a disguised or hidden disability which is mainly associated with psychological process. It refers to psychological disorder or dysfunctional nervous system which results either in delay or disturbs attention, memory, communication, spelling and calculation. In view of its causes, learning disability may be genetic, bio-chemical or neurological<sup>1</sup>. Learning disability is one of the most complicated and academic influencing disability related to the area of psychology and its prevalence is estimated 2% at lowest level and 20 to 40% at the highest level.<sup>2</sup>

Unlike other disabilities, learning disability is hidden and primarily related to manner in which our brain neurologic system controls various signals of memory.<sup>3</sup> It is a distinctive handicapping condition which presents in average to superior

intelligence.<sup>4</sup>

Initial warning signs of learning disabilities are seen in academic progress where children face a great trouble in learning and real trouble is seen in discrepancy of how these children struggle and what they really achieve in view of learning.<sup>5</sup>

It is today's dilemma that primary teacher lack required capabilities to judge these disabilities. It has been examined that training package for learning disabilities brings a significant change among students. Most of problems arise in the form of reading, writing, spelling and calculation.<sup>6,9</sup>

There are two main categories of learning disability in general which are verbal and non-verbal.<sup>7</sup> The terms of learning disabilities and its associated problems are described as dyslexia (reading disability), dysgraphia (disability of forming words and letters), discusia (impairment in deriving meanings or speech), dyskinesia (clumsiness or poor coordination), dyscalculia (impairment in mathematical ability), dyslogia (faulty formation of verbal ideas), dysnomia (difficulty in searching for and thinking of a word to express thought), dysrhythmia (poor rhythm or loss of ability to move with rhythm).<sup>8</sup>

Dyslexia is a prominent learning disability among school going children, however based on language experience reading intervention may be developed because it will accelerate students in their achievements. A good practitioner through interest, motivation and by recognizing individual differences can develop sound strategies for these children.<sup>9</sup> Attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is also a behavioral and neuro cognitive problem affecting gross motor skills.<sup>10</sup> The

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mechanism of assessment is poor because instead of curriculum based, achievement based assessments are carried. Teachers are still relying mostly on teacher-made tests to assess these children. Despite of norm reference tests data acquisition and psychological based assessment is still lacking.<sup>11,12</sup>

A teacher must use techniques of task analysis, task breaking, strength judgment, verbal and written instructions, extra time, text book on tape, help from computer and good communication with parents to address such issues.<sup>13,14</sup>

Systematic program and awareness among physicians, paraprofessionals, educational administrators and stakeholders may be designed.<sup>15,16</sup>

In countries like Pakistan training and awareness of learning disabilities is moving at an early arena. There are only a few training institutions and early diagnosis and services to at risk children are still lacking.<sup>17</sup> In view of problems understudy following research hypothesis were formulated.

1. Teachers teaching at primary level are well aware about learning disabilities among children.
2. There is a significant difference in awareness level about learning disabilities among teachers having more age than those of less age.
3. There is a significant difference in awareness level about learning disabilities among teachers who have longer teaching experience than those of novice teachers.

On the basis of this hypothesis we conducted this study with our objective to identify the level of awareness of learning disabilities among mainstream female teachers in Islamabad and to differentiate the level in view of human age and teaching experience.

## METHODOLOGY

This descriptive study was conducted on 28 female primary schools from 29<sup>th</sup> September 2011 to 31<sup>st</sup> October 2011 in urban sector of Islamabad. The Islamabad has been divided in seven sectors and study was conducted in urban sector of Islamabad only. The independent variables of study were age and teaching experience while teachers' level of awareness about learning disability was dependent variable. There were total 396 female teachers out of which 74 teachers were randomly selected from lists of teachers. A self-structured questionnaire was used as a tool of research.

The participants were selected through simple random sampling. The ratio of selected participants was 21% of total population. Participants were different in view of demographic variables like age, education and experience.

A questionnaire containing 30 items was used as a research instrument. First 29 items of instrument covered the aspects of learning disabilities and one item was on general concept of learning disability. Last item was kept open ended for participants to write their opinions. Instrument also went through face and content validity. To determine reliability of instrument first version of instrument was piloted on 24 primary teachers in a separate mainstream female school. Reliability in terms of cronbach's alpha was calculated .83. Instrument was objective-typed comprising the multiple choice questions. At

the end it was transcribed in Urdu language with the help of Urdu expert for better comprehension and response of participants.

Prior permission of study was accorded first from area education officer (AEO) of urban sector schools and then those headmistresses under whom leadership sample of study was working. In the end data was analyzed on average/percentages by using descriptive statistics. Rating to level of awareness was given according to acquired score of multiple choice questions on following scales like 25% or less = Poor, 26-40% = Low average, 41-55% = Average, 56-70% = High average, 71-85% = Superior and 86-100% = Very superior.

## RESULTS

Data which was collected from female teachers through survey instrument was interpreted at the end. Data was coded according to demographic variables and it was analyzed to test hypothesis. Qualitative data of open ended responses was also analyzed at the closing stages. Table -II & Figure I indicates the level of awareness for types of learning types of disabilities. In most types of learning disabilities level of awareness was low average or hardly average. In the general concept of learning disabilities level of awareness was 42.56% and it was average. Speech disability was low average because response to correct items was 37.83%. In dyslexia the response rate was 66.22% which was high average. In dysgraphia (writing disability) level of awareness was better after dyslexia. Percentage of awareness was 48.64% which was average. In social and emotional disability the awareness was better which was 51.35%.

Most adverse areas were dyscalculia, Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and the term of learning disability. In dyscalculia percentage of awareness was 41.21%. Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder was in low average awareness with 38.51%. General term of learning disability was judged in one item where its awareness was at lowest with 18.91%. Dysgraphia, dyslexia and general awareness of learning disability were marginally better in view of awareness. As a whole level of awareness in all types of learning disabilities was 46.62% which was also average. Therefore on the basis of these results first hypothesis of study "teachers teaching at primary level are well aware about learning disabilities among children" is rejected. In order to test other hypothesis for level of awareness in view of age and experiences Table -III & IV with related graphs are with complete details about awareness in view of age range.

Table -III shows the level of awareness of teachers in view of their human age. It shows that teachers with 29 years of age or less are more aware as compared to 30-39 years. Teachers of 29 years or less fall in high average, while 30-39 and more than 40 years are at average level of awareness. Teacher specially having 40 years or more ages are falling in lowest category of awareness. In view of these results second hypothesis "there is a significant difference in awareness level of teacher with more or less age is accepted".

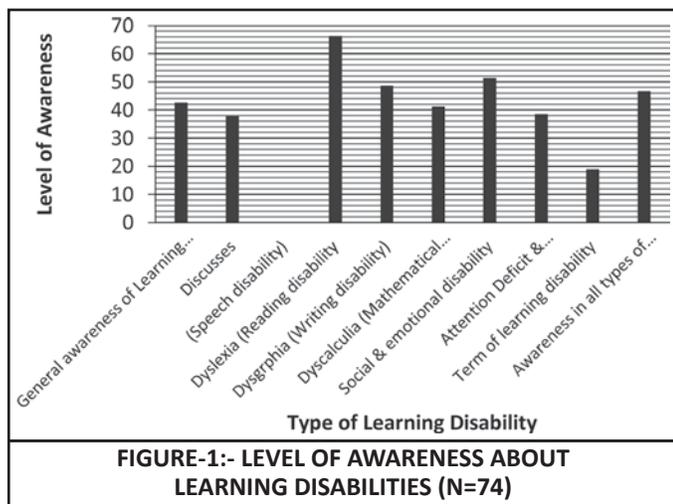
In order to test third hypothesis, level of awareness was

examined in view of teaching experience. Table-IV with its figure is a complete detail about awareness in view of teachers' experience. It shows that teachers with moderate and middle experience were better in awareness. Newly enrolled and old

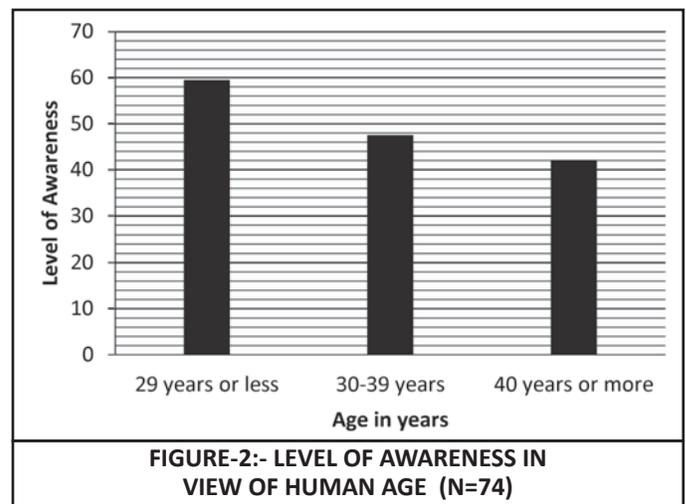
teachers were not well aware about learning disability. Therefore on the basis of results third hypothesis is accepted too.

**TABLE - I: DISTRIBUTION OF SAMPLE ACCORDING TO HUMAN AGE, EDUCATION AND EXPERIENCE (N=74)**

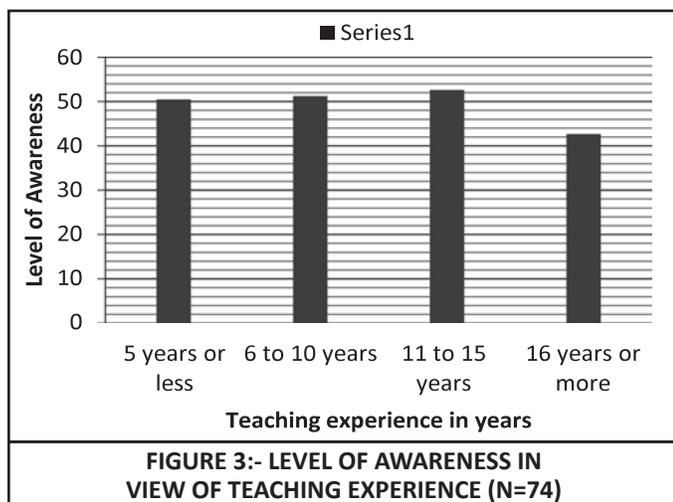
Variable	N	Percentage
<i>Age</i>		
29 years or less	30	41
30-39 years	28	38
40 years or more	16	21
<i>Educational Qualification</i>		
Matriculation	06	08
Intermediate	08	11
Bachelors	20	27
Masters	40	54
<i>Teaching experience</i>		
05 years or less	22	29
06 to 10 years	12	16
11-15 years	08	11
16 years or more	32	44



**FIGURE-1:- LEVEL OF AWARENESS ABOUT LEARNING DISABILITIES (N=74)**



**FIGURE-2:- LEVEL OF AWARENESS IN VIEW OF HUMAN AGE (N=74)**



**FIGURE 3:- LEVEL OF AWARENESS IN VIEW OF TEACHING EXPERIENCE (N=74)**

**DISCUSSION**

The aim of present research was to investigate the level of awareness among female primary teachers in urban sector of Islamabad. Competency of early diagnosis and awareness of learning disabilities is required in the mainstream schools because this disability also persists in these schools. In early years a lot of children either fail or drop out from schools due to such problems.<sup>18</sup> Results of this study showed that in view of teaching experience teachers with less and moderate experiences have better knowledge and awareness of learning disabilities. Teachers with 16 years or more experiences were very poor in this regard. Training of awareness of these older teachers was immediately required. Retody and Sujathamalini denote that awareness in disabilities means having knowledge or being fully aware of or well informed about the concept of

disabilities in children, causes and characteristics of children with disabilities, teaching training methods, guidance and counseling to children as well as parents and community.<sup>21</sup> According to Al khateeb students in most of the countries are commonly educated for their learning disabilities in mainstream schools. These children need a range of special support services specially resource rooms to meet individual needs.<sup>20,21</sup> Plight of mainstream school female teachers in Pakistan is not acceptable in the light of rapid changes in system of education and technology. Teachers in Pakistan must be aware of special needs of children and should get additional training and courses. But teachers are still not well aware of general concept of learning disability and its effects on school children. Dyscalculia and dysgraphia are at a very lower level of awareness.<sup>19</sup> Although primary education mainstream teachers in Pakistan are at early stage of training for special needs children but to achieve dream of universal primary education (UPE) and to increase literacy ratio, they must be trained for identification, intervention, diagnosis and assessment of learning disabilities. Teachers in view of this research are having least knowledge about learning disabilities especially those who are more than forty years of ages. Novice teachers and those with less teaching experience have better knowledge in this regard. Teachers also incorporated the suggestions in open ended responses that curriculum review, parents support, children motivation to learn, teaching aids and extra facilities for learning disabled may help to resolve such issues. Parent teacher coordination and inclusion of practical activities and concrete concepts for learning disabled was also urged.

### CONCLUSION

In the light of results and discussion of this study author concludes that most of female primary teacher teaching in urban sectors public schools of Islamabad were not well aware of learning disabilities. These teachers lack the competencies and capabilities and require a heed attention in view of their training and professional development. The difference of awareness in view of age, experience etc also prevails among teachers.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of conclusion following recommendations have been proposed.

1. Awareness of learning disabilities for general public and academic community may be made prominent through electronic and print media.
2. Learning disability may be included in teacher training programs of diploma in education, B.Ed and M.Ed.
3. Short term in-service training programs may be designed for those teachers who are in 40 years or more ages
4. Practical activities and concrete concepts in curriculum may be included like arts, sports and fun etc.
5. Physical resources in view of equipment and technological aids may be provided in school.

### Contribution of Authors:

Ahmed Z: Conceived Idea, Literature Search, Manuscript Writing, Manuscript final reading and approval  
Din M: Designed Research Study, Manuscript Writing

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