

Knowledge and attitudes toward children with specific learning disabilities among primary school teachers in the Mathugama Educational Zone; a preliminary study

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Background: The teachers' role in identifying Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD) in primary grades is significant, and teachers play a unique role in this process. To make the education for the students with SLD successful, teachers require knowledge of different types of SLD and an understanding of their students with SLD.

Objectives: The purpose of this study is to investigate primary school teachers' knowledge and attitudes toward children with specific learning disabilities (SLD).

Methods: This descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted with 248 primary school teachers. The self-selection sampling method was used to select participants from the Mathugama Educational Zone in Sri Lanka. An online questionnaire was used to collect data, and the questionnaire consisted of 3 sections: demographical details, teachers' knowledge, and their attitudes toward children with SLD.

Results: Most primary school teachers are conversant on some aspects of children with SLD such as characteristics of SLD and handling a child with SLD in the regular class. Teachers' knowledge of SLD significantly changed according to gender ($p < .05$). This indicated that males have more knowledge about SLD than female teachers. However, there was no significant association between teachers' knowledge with other demographical details such as age, teaching experience, educational level, teaching grade, training in special education, and having a student with SLD in the class. Overall, participants have positive attitudes about training programs.

Conclusion: Overall, most of the study participants had average knowledge levels in areas such as management of children with SLD, risk factors, and some symptoms about SLD. However, knowledge level in some symptoms such as IQ level and aetiology of SLD were inadequate. Attitudes regarding their responsibilities in managing children with SLD were positive. On the contrary, a majority of teachers do not have positive attitudes to raise the quality of life of children with SLD and they reported that they felt more sympathy toward the student with SLD than the student without SLD. The study further revealed that most participants had not attended the training programs on teaching children with SLD. Therefore, the relevant institutes or authorities should implement frequent workshops to improving the above aspects regarding the knowledge and attitudes of SLD.

Keywords: *Knowledge, Attitudes, Specific Learning Disability, Teachers*