



## **PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS' KNOWLEDGE OF LEARNING DISABILITIES IN ILORIN-WEST LOCAL GOVERNMENT, KWARA STATE**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This study examined the primary school teachers' knowledge of learning disabilities in Ilorin West Local Government, Kwara State. The study was a descriptive design of survey, and a sample of 150 primary school teachers were selected using simple random procedure out of a total population of 1,837 primary school teachers in Ilorin West Local Government Area. A 10 item researcher-designed questionnaire with psychometric properties of content validity and 0.65 reliability index was used to elicit the needed data from the respondents. Frequency counts and percentages were used for answering the research questions. The findings of the study showed that the majority (62.67%) of the teachers did not know that head injuries, nutritional deprivation and exposure to toxic substances can contribute to learning disabilities. Also a considerable percentage (51.3%) of the teachers did not know that children with learning disabilities do have a problem in understanding body language and facial expressions. Based on the findings, it was among others recommended that the school authorities should employ professionally qualified educational psychologists to teach the teachers about class management with a view to decreasing distraction for pupils with learning disabilities*

**KEY WORDS:** Teachers' Knowledge, Learning Disabilities, Facial Expression and Nutrition

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

According to Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS;2013), Nigeria now has a population of 173.6 million out of whom 12 million are living with learning disabilities, and out of that number, 6 million are children (Vanguardngr,2014). Learning disability is a condition that gives rise to learning difficulties, especially when not associated with physical disability. It is otherwise called learning disorder. Learning disability is recognized by health professionals as a cognitive neurobiological disorder and/or language processing disorder caused by atypical brain functioning. They are manifested by significant difficulties for listening, speaking, reading and writing, reasoning or mathematic abilities (Silver *et al.*, 2008).

According to Encyclopaedia of Children's Health (2014), how learning is being influenced by disorders may not be easily observable. Nevertheless, successful learning of an individual is a function of the condition of the brain. Effective learning activities are fostered when the brain is in perfect order. What does learning then connote? Learning is said to be taking place when the behaviour of an individual member of a society is transformed in an acceptable manner to the society in which the individual lives. If this change is actually observed and demonstrated then learning is said to have taken place. For instance, a child who is unable to successfully complete a given arithmetic task is now able to do that at ease after some experience and practice. Also, if a child who disobeys parents' order now comes to discover that such habit is bad and imbibe the culture of obedience, he has learnt that disobedience to parents is bad. Learning Disabilities or Disorders refer to any impediment in a child's ability to read, comprehend, write and organize his or her thoughts, and present such learnt materials or thoughts in a sequential manner and when it is required by him or her to do so. A child with learning disorders experience difficulty in such academic activities or tasks such as reading, performing mathematics tasks or making written expressions. This is not to say that the intelligence of children with learning disorders is below normal as learning disorders have little or

nothing to do with intelligence of a child. Children and adults like of average to above average intelligence do experience difficulties in academic work as a result of learning disorders. Learning disorders of children are not mere difficulties in reading, writing, Mathematics, listening, speaking and reading because these difficulties resulting from disorders significantly interfere with academic achievements and daily living.

The current UBE programme in Nigeria is a re-emergence of the Universal Primary Education (UPE) programme of the late 1970's. This current UBE was officially launched on 30th September 1999 in Sokoto by the then President of Nigeria, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo (Tahir, 2001). For the goals of the UBE to be achieved, learning difficulties among children can serve as a cog in the wheel of progress capable of truncating the achievement of the desired results. It therefore becomes imperative on parents, teachers and other stakeholders in the programme to put in place some workable modalities to address issue of children's learning difficulties. Learning disorders are synonymous to learning difficulties or learning disabilities. Whichever term is used, the classification includes several disorders in which an individual has difficulty in a typical manner, resulting from an unknown factor or factors (Tahir, 2001).

### Statement of the Problem

Often, teachers categorize many students as "dull", "unintelligent", "slow-learning", etc. Others are even labelled as "truants", "extroverts", "introverts", "bullies", etc., and evidences are now abound to show that many of the students so categorized and labelled do simply manifest signs or symptoms of learning disabilities. It is a condition that gives rise to learning difficulties especially when not associated with physical disability. A lot of learners face difficulties in their education and are not able to study courses of their choice because of a disability in one area of learning which could have easily been remediated if detected early. In a study by Kessel, Ningenbach and Lawver (2009) on student teachers' knowledge of the individual with disabilities

education act, the authors found that overall, 74.5% felt they were prepared to teach special needs students in agricultural education classrooms and laboratories. In Nigeria, 50% of people with learning disabilities are children, and therefore, the researchers found it imperative to find out the primary school teachers' knowledge of learning disabilities in Ilorin West Local Government Area of Kwara State, Nigeria. The general purpose of this study was to critically examine primary school teachers' knowledge of learning disabilities. Specifically, the study investigated;

1. Teachers' knowledge of the causes of learning disabilities among primary school pupils.
2. The level of teachers' knowledge based on the signs and symptoms of learning disability among primary school pupils.

**Research Questions**

The following questions were formulated in order to find solutions to the problems identified.

1. What is the level of teachers' knowledge about the causes of learning disabilities among the pupils?
2. What is the level of teachers' knowledge about the signs and symptoms of learning disabilities among the primary school pupils?

**2 METHODOLOGY**

The research design adopted for gathering information for this research work was survey design. This method was the most appropriate for this research work as it enables the researcher to describe through the collection and analysis of data, and arriving at conclusions and making recommendations based on the data collected from the respondents through the use of a questionnaire. Osuala, (2001) remarked that survey method uncovers data, interprets synthesis, integrate these data and point to implications and interrelationship between the variables. A sample of 150 primary

schools teachers was selected using simple random procedure out of a total population of 1,837 primary school teachers in Ilorin West Local Government Area. A 10 items researcher-designed questionnaire with psychometric properties of content validity, and 0.65 reliability index was used to elicit the needed data from the respondents. Frequency counts and percentages were used for answering the research questions.

**3 RESULTS**

**Research Question One:** Are the primary school teachers knowledgeable about the causes of learning disability?

**Table 1: Primary School Teachers' Knowledge about the Causes of Learning Disability**

Knowledge on Causes of LD	YES (%)	NO (%)	Total
Learning disabilities can be caused by illness or injury during, before or after birth.	142 (94.67)	8 (5.33)	150 (100)
Head injuries, nutritional deprivation and exposure to toxic substances cannot contribute to learning disabilities.	94 (62.67)	56 (37.33)	150 (100)
Environmental factors such as poor parental healthcare and malnutrition may constitute learning disabilities.	136 (90.67)	14 (9.33)	150 (100)
It is uncommon to find that people with learning disabilities have parents or relatives with similar difficulties.	95 (63.33)	55 (36.67)	150 (100)
German measles contracted during the first three months of pregnancy may cause learning disabilities.	76 (50.67)	74 (49.33)	150 (100)

Table 1 shows that 142 (94.67%) of the teachers knew that learning disabilities can be caused by illness or injury during, before or after birth. This was followed by 136 (90.67%) of the teachers who knew that environmental factors such as poor parental healthcare and malnutrition may cause learning disabilities. The next item had 76 (50.67%) of the teachers knew that German measles contracted during the first three months of pregnancy may cause learning disabilities. Unfortunately, 95 (63.33%) of the teachers did not know that it is uncommon to find that people with learning disabilities have parents or relatives with similar difficulties. Lastly, 94 (62.67%) of the teachers did not know that head injuries, nutritional deprivations and exposure to toxic substances can contribute to learning disabilities.

**Research Question Two:** Are the primary school teachers knowledgeable about the signs and symptoms of learning disabilities among primary school pupils?

**Table 2: The Level of Teachers' Knowledge about the Signs and Symptoms of Learning Disabilities among Primary School pupils**

Knowledge on Sign and Symptoms of LD	YES %	NO %	Total %
Children with learning disabilities usually have normal intelligence, but they have trouble expressing their knowledge.	137 (91.3)	13 (8.6)	150 (100)
Pupils with learning disabilities do not struggle with writing in several areas.	71 (47.3)	79 (52.6)	150 (100)
Pupils with learning disabilities may have trouble acquiring new skills and depend on memorization.	138 (92)	12 (8.0)	150 (100)
Children with learning disabilities do not have problem understanding body language and facial expression.	77 (51.3)	73 (48.6)	150 (100)
Some learning disabled children are known to be hyperactive that is restless, impatient, intolerant etc.	104 (69.3)	46 (30.6)	150 (100)

Table 2 shows that 138 (92%) of the teachers knew that pupils with learning disabilities may have trouble acquiring new skills and depend on memorization. Also, 137 (91.33%) of the teachers knew that children with learning disabilities usually have normal intelligence, but they have trouble expressing their knowledge. On the other hand, 104 (69.33%) of the teachers who knew that some learning disabled children are known to be hyperactive that is restless, impatient and intolerant. Lastly, 79 (52.67%) of the teachers knew that pupils with learning disabilities do struggle with writing in several areas. However, 77 (51.33%) of the teachers did not know that children with learning disabilities do have problems in understanding body language and facial expressions.

#### 4 DISCUSSION

The first research question sought to know the level of primary school teachers' knowledge about the causes of learning disability, which according to the result of the findings, highest proportion of the teachers did not know that learning disabilities can be caused by illness or head injury during, before or after birth; Environmental factors such as poor parental healthcare and malnutrition; and German measles contacted during the first three months of pregnancy which may also cause learning disabilities. This finding agrees with Simos, Fletcher, Sarkari, Billingsley, Castillo, Patariaia, Francis, Denton, and Papanicolauo, (2005), position that learning disability is as a result of one or combination of the following: heredity, problem during pregnancy, incidents after birth, and environmental factors.

The second research question was formulated to look into the level of teachers' knowledge about the signs and symptoms of learning disabilities among primary school pupils. Based on the findings, many of the teachers knew that pupils with learning disabilities may have trouble acquiring new skills and depend on memorization; that pupils with learning disabilities do struggle with writing in several areas; that children with learning disabilities usually have normal intelligence, but they have trouble expressing their knowledge; and that some

learning disabled children are known to be hyperactive that is restless, impatient and intolerance which is in compliance with Kenyans and Lynch (2007), who opined that pupils with learning disabilities have normal or better intelligence, but they also have severe “information-processing deficits”. Also, children with learning disorders according to Vanguardnr (2014) usually experience difficulties in certain tasks such as reading, writing, Mathematics, listening, speaking and reading and these tend to significantly interfere with academic achievements or daily living. However, few of the teachers did not know that children with learning disabilities do have problem understanding body language and facial expression.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS

From the ongoing, it could be concluded that knowledge of learning disabilities among the primary school teachers was not convincingly adequate. As revealed in the findings, majority of the teachers did not know that head injuries, nutritional deprivation and exposure to toxic substances can contribute to learning disabilities. Also, a good percentage of the teachers did not know that children with learning disabilities do have problem understanding body language and facial expression as well. Also, teachers did not know that distractions should be decreased in the classroom for children with learning disabilities and in as much as every child with a learning disability is different and will exhibit different signs; the first step toward improving their academic life is recognizing that a student might have a learning disability.

## 6 RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the empirical findings concerning the primary school teachers' knowledge of learning disabilities in Ilorin West Local Government, the following recommendations are proposed;

1. The Federal Ministry of Education should orientate the teachers on knowledge of causes of learning disabilities.
2. The school authority should employ guidance counsellors and psychologists to

train the teachers on how to understand the body language and facial expression of pupils with learning disabilities.

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