

# **Teachers' knowledge on symptoms, attitudes, and classroom teaching strategies for Specific Learning Disabilities: A study among Tamil speaking primary school teachers in the Nuwara Eliya Educational Zone, Sri Lanka**

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**Background:** A learning disability is a condition that is characterized by difficulties with listening, speaking, reading, writing or mathematics. Dyslexia, dysgraphia, and dyscalculia are the most common learning disabilities. The primary level teachers carry a significant responsibility in identifying children with Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD).

**Objectives:** The objective of this study was to identify the teachers' levels of knowledge and their attitudes towards children with specific learning disabilities, and their use of classroom strategies when working with children with specific learning disabilities in the Nuwara Eliya Educational Zone.

**Methods:** A sample of 167 Tamil primary school teachers were recruited for the study. A descriptive cross-sectional quantitative study was used to collect information from the participants. The questionnaire was developed based on evidence-based research. In addition, a convenient sampling method was used. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Software was used to analyze the data.

**Results:** The majority of the teachers were females (69.3%-n = 115). Most of the teachers were aware of SLD characteristics as 77.7% (n =129) of the participants believed that language-based learning disability is called dyslexia. Also, 23.5% (n=39) teachers reported that students with dysgraphia mix up upper/lower case/cursive writing. More than 42.2% (n = 70) teachers believe that pupils who have difficulty in measuring (weight/distance/time) have dyscalculia. Most of the teachers had a personal experience of at least one student with SLD who has difficulty taking notes in the class. Although most of the teachers understand the challenges, nearly 121 out of 165 primary teachers agree that they have insufficient time to teach students with SLD.

**Conclusion:** Most of the primary teachers had a basic understanding of SLD identification and characteristics. Teachers are also aware of how to use classroom strategies for students with SLD. However, teachers frequently use those strategies for the entire class and are unaware of specific strategies like Individual Education Plans. In addition, the majority of the teachers had a reasonable understanding of the difficulties experienced by children with SLD.

**Key words:** *Specific learning disabilities, Knowledge, Classroom strategies, Attitudes, Primary school teacher*