

Exploring the level of awareness of dyslexia among private school teachers

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Abstract

Dyslexia is a neurological learning disorder, most commonly prevailed in school children that cause difficulties in reading, poor spelling and comprehending capabilities. Since it lacks physically visible signs and symptoms, therefore it is difficult to recognize the victims of this disability. The children, who are not diagnosed at an early stage, have to face many problems in their social life and thus, can undergo frustrations, inferiority complex and embarrassment due to failure of accomplishment, specifically in academics. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the methods, teachers can apply to recognize students with Dyslexia as well as to find out the solution they can use to overcome the problems victims experience in the classroom. For this purpose data was collected through purposive sampling from 20 participants of four private schools; five primary teachers from each school of district Shaheed Benazirabad. A questionnaire was designed to get a perception of teachers regarding dyslexia in school children. The results indicated that sixteen teachers had never heard the term Dyslexia. Only four teachers knew about the disability but they had shallow knowledge which shows that there is a lack of awareness among school teachers.

Keywords: awareness, dyslexia, neurological disorder, private School teachers

Introduction

Nowadays, lots of children are suffering from educational institutions, because of learning disabilities. Among various types of learning disabilities, 'Dyslexia' is one of them, most commonly found in school children. 5 to 17 % of school-aged children are victims of this disability (Habib and Giraud, 2013) ^[8]. As per the International Dyslexia Association, this learning disability, having a neurobiological origin causes difficulties in reading, poor spelling and comprehending capabilities of a child. These troubles often emerge because of the phonological deficit of language despite having proper academic instructions (IDA, 2012) ^[10]. Dyslexic people have difficulty with written words since their capacity of acquiring the basic skills for effective reading is usually weak. They might read some letters and words backward and sometime in reverse direction (Bishop & League, 2006) ^[4]. Soriano & Echegaray (2014) ^[24] are of the view that dyslexia is a hidden disability, lacking physically visible signs and symptoms to be detected. It affects both children and adults, but it is most frequently found in childhood (Leekam *et al.*, 2007) ^[15] since children can hardly hide the problems and difficulties they experience while learning. The symptoms of this disability are trouble in reading, talking, and difficulty in the comprehension of similar sounds. A child with dyslexia usually tends to read silently and has bad handwriting, as well (Tops *et al.*, 2013) ^[25]. Along with these difficulties, he might experience difficulty in poor phonological memory as well as vocabulary which in turn results in the lack of social skills and very little span of concentration (Campbell & Butterworth, 1985) ^[6]. Therefore, children with dyslexia face several difficulties in their social life. Furthermore, these children can go through frustrations and embarrassment due to failure in achievements, specifically in academics (Hamid *et al.*,

2015) ^[9].

The reason behind these difficulties of poor spelling, word recognition and comprehending abilities in dyslexic children is the result of deficits that take place in the phonological part of language which is connected to the cognitive abilities (Soriano & Echegaray, 2014) ^[24]. Difficulties in writing are the result of high neural activities being found on the right brain hemisphere in comparison to the left one, suggesting the neurobiological compensation pathway in the right side of the brain hemisphere while reading and writing (Mohamad *et al.* 2015) ^[17].

Three types of Dyslexia are commonly found, namely: - Visio-spatial dyslexia, speech sound or peripheral or letter position dyslexia, and surface dyslexia (Alosbhi *et al.*, 2015) ^[2]. Each victim could experience unique problems in regard to literacy, memory, and numeracy (Baker, 2006) ^[3]. (a) Children who are suffering from Visio-spatial understand concepts via feelings and emotions in comparison to those of sounds and written words. This is due to the reason that these children find it difficult to build up an enough understanding of sounds and words, which ultimately make the typical educational surrounding an inconvenient to these victims. These types of children exhibit preference over sensory learning experiences rather than an auditory one. Thus, the aim of the majority of the modern technologies is to assist dyslexic children of this type with a focus on interpreting visual information to sensory experiences, for instance; written text to speech readers application. (b) Children with the peripheral type of dyslexia most likely stutter when they are in a stressful situation and while speaking they tend to mispronounce words having many syllables (Moreland, 2015) ^[18]. That is why they usually hesitate to perform those tasks that are consists of discussions or presentations. These types of victims are anti-social and are more efficient when working in isolation

(Alsobhi *et al.*, 2015) ^[2]. As per Friedmann & Coltheart, (2016)⁷ these victims of dyslexia have difficulty in encoding the sequence of the letters in words, though they can easily and correctly identify those letters. The main symptom of this disease is the disorderliness of letters within words (Kohnen, *et al.*, 2012) ^[13], for instance, words such as *diary* and *blow* may be pronounced wrongly as 'dairy' and 'bowl'. Another symptom of this type is the deletion of double letters within words. For instance; they may pronounce, 'been' as 'ben' and 'bluebird' as 'blueird'. (c) Children with surface dyslexia tend to read out loudly by converting a letter sequence into a phoneme sequence. This lead to many problems in reading, e.g. regularization errors while reading out loudly irregular words such as 'eye' or 'who' those have silent letters.

Riddick (2001) ^[21] is of the view that due to dyslexia, children in schools become victims of bullying and face various emotional, social and behavioral problems and because of this reason they often come up quitting schools. They feel demotivated and frustrated and hence they lose their interest in almost everything. The reason why these children have difficulty in becoming a part of typical schools is either that the teachers are unwilling to work extra on these children or the school policy creates an obstacle for them resulting in their deprivation from mainstream education (Naem, Mahmood & Saleem, 2014) ^[19].

Pakistan, located in South Asia is an already underdeveloped country, where acquiring basic education in a proper manner is quite a big challenge as Salman (2015) ^[22] argues that the education sector of Pakistan has many drawbacks and as a result, the country has low literacy rate. There are many reasons behind this insufficiency of quality education but the most important cause as discussed by (Salman, 2015) ^[22] is that the head teachers and teachers are designated in schools without any professional development. In this devastating situation, it is very difficult to focus on children who are suffering from learning disabilities. Thus, in Pakistan, the awareness of disabilities is barely limited to some private sector schools where only those children study whose parents can afford their heavy school fees (Salman, 2015) ^[22].

In Pakistan, the rate of dyslexia among children is 15–20%, which means about 12 million children are in need of help (Khaliq *et al.*, 2017) ^[11]. Since students who are having this disability are difficult to be recognized without teachers' knowledge and awareness about this disability, therefore this study tries to investigate the level of awareness about Dyslexia among private school teachers of district Shaheed Benazirabad.

Objectives

1. To find out the methods, teachers can apply to recognize students with Dyslexia in the classroom.
2. To find out the solutions, teachers can use in overcoming the problems dyslexic students experience in the classroom.

Literature review

Various researches have been conducted on dyslexia, its prevalence, and interventions as well as its awareness among teachers of educational institutions. Klein (2017) ^[12] intended to determine if teachers are able to recognize the characteristics of dyslexia. For achieving her objectives, she

obtained information from 44 masters' graduate students through the help of the survey. Her survey identified some areas where teachers were successful in recognizing characteristics, but the majority of dyslexic characteristics could not be recognized.

Aladwani *et al.* (2012) ^[1] conducted research on Primary School teachers of Kuwait in order to assess their knowledge regarding dyslexia and its early signs and symptoms among their students. For this purpose, he collected data via a survey from 700 participants across six districts of Kuwait. His results indicated that most of the teachers were lacking the training. Further; they had almost no knowledge, or skills to analyze the dyslexic victims. Similarly, Shetty & Sanjeev (2014) ^[23] assessed the knowledge of dyslexia in elementary school teachers. His findings revealed that 262 participants had heard the name of the disability; just 24 teachers were trained and merely 1 teacher had ample understanding of the disability.

Another study was conducted by Kumar (2016) ^[14], where he intended to establish the degree regarding awareness in secondary school teachers of District Papumpare of Arunachal Pradesh. His findings showed that mean scores about awareness of teachers remained below 15% which in turn indicates that the awareness among the secondary school teachers about dyslexia is very low.

Similarly, Chourmouziadou (2016) ^[16] explored Greece primary school teachers' knowledge regarding dyslexia. For this purpose, she constructed a questionnaire based on the existing literature. Data was collected from 204 participants of both private and public sector schools. The results revealed that teachers' understanding of dyslexia varied significantly. Some gaps in their knowledge, as well as misconceptions about disability, were also found. Her findings also revealed that teachers had a lack of awareness concerning the strategies and intervention programs for affected children

Likewise, Khaliq *et al.* (2017) ^[11] also assessed the awareness of recognizing dyslexia and in service courses about learning disability among school teachers. His results showed that elementary schools teachers of Lahore did not even know the term dyslexia. Just a few of them had some knowledge of its recognition as well as of class management.

Ogunsola (2018) ^[20], observed if there is any association between qualifications of teachers and recognition of dyslexia in Nigerian primary schools. He obtained Data from 147 primary school teachers. The results indicated that teachers had very insufficient amount of knowledge regarding dyslexia. Only 31% of teachers had sufficient knowledge. Findings further showed that there is a weak relationship between their qualifications and their experiences indicating that both of these variables are not dependent on each other. As a result, teachers' knowledge concerning dyslexia is not in relation to their qualifications.

In the year 2015, Salman ^[22] carried out a study in Pakistan where he explored the primary school heads and teachers' perception in assisting children affected by dyslexia in primary schools of Pakistan. He selected eight participants; among them were four school heads and four teachers from elite private schools of Karachi. He used in-depth interviews in order to get perception of school heads and teachers about the facilitation of dyslexic victims. His findings indicated that dyslexic children experience different emotional and

academic troubles but only a few primary schools provided the policy to assist them in conventional education. Further; it revealed that in contrast to other developed countries, except a few elite private schools in Pakistan, there is no attention paid to professional training pertaining to dyslexia.

Methodology

The study used the questionnaire as its tool because the questionnaire can help in knowing the opinions of the participants. As per Brown (2001) [5], questionnaires give quick as well as efficient advantages. Through this method, the researchers can cover a huge number of respondents in a short span of time. The study seeks not any other method such as content Analysis as this topic is virtually unknown in Pakistan; therefore, no literature is available.

Method

This study used both close and open-ended questions based questionnaire. The target population was private school teachers. For achieving the objectives, purposive sampling was used to gather data that include only English language teachers who teach English to students of Grade 1 to 5. The purpose behind choosing private schools was that they claim

that they provide quality education, enhance creativity and boost up confidence level in their students.

The questionnaire was based on three main questions. Among these questions, one was close-ended while two were open-ended questions.

1. 1. Do you know about Dyslexia? (A) Yes (B) No
2. How do you recognize students affected by Dyslexia in the classroom?
3. How do you help students (dyslexic) to overcome their problems in the classroom?

In addition to these questions, some demographic related questions were also asked for collecting general information from teachers such as (age, gender, academic qualification, and teaching experience).

The questionnaire was sent to four private sector schools (Shah Faisal Memorial, Gulshan public, the strong Base, and Air foundation) of district Shaheed Benazirabad. Five teachers were taken from each school. All teachers had teaching experience from 3 months to 10 years.

Results

Table 1: Demographic items

Participant	Gender	Age	Qualification	Teaching Experience
P1	Female	24	M.A English	1 year
P2	Female	20	B.Sc.	3 years
P3	Male	23	BS mathematics	2 years
P4	Female	23	M.A English	3 years
P5	Female	40	M.A Sociology	10 years
P6	Female	23	BS English	3 months
P7	Female	28	M.Com.	5 years
P8	Male	24	B.Sc.	4 Years
P9	Male	33	M.A English	10 years
P10	Female	23	B.Sc.	3 years
P11	Male	24	B. A	5 years
P12	Female	22	M.SC	2 years
P13	Female	26	B.Sc.	4 years
P14	Female	22	BS English	2 years
P15	Female	24	BS English	3 years
P16	Female	21	B.Sc.	1 year
P17	Female	26	B.Sc.	3 years
P18	Female	26	B.Ed., B.Sc.	3 years
P19	Female	24	B.Sc.	2 years
P20	Male	27	M.A	4 years

Table 1 demonstrates the demographic items of twenty teachers who completed the survey. It shows how many male and female teachers participated in this research. The table also shows their age, academic qualification, and their teaching experience.

Data Analysis

Twenty teachers were selected from different schools teaching students of Grade 1 to 5 so to have a comprehensive understanding regarding the perception and understanding of the teacher of the disease named dyslexia. Sixteen out of twenty confessed no understanding of the disease as indicated by their opting of the option 'No'. Four out of twenty (P5, P8, P9, and P11) knew about the disease but the understanding of there is of very superficial level; further, they have almost no ideas about the methods of teaching and addressing the particular deficiency among the students.

The participants who opted to the option yes answer further

2 questions as;

Q How do you recognize students affected by Dyslexia in the classroom?

P5 "I recognize them by their habits"

P8; "I recognize them by asking the symbols of reading and writing"

P9;"Such students can be easily recognized by conducting tests and also reading and dictation"

P11: "I recognize them by reading skills".

Above are some responses the researcher had from participants. None of them had enough knowledge about this learning disability.

Q How do you help students (dyslexic) to overcome their problems in the classroom?

P5 "By cooperating with them"

P8 "To me these kinds of problems can be solved by carefully treating children with love."

P9 "Teacher must prefer these students to allow them front seats, by giving them H.W on the daily basis."

P11 “I help them to solve their problems by more reading”
None of them was aware of the ways or methods by which these children can be helped.

Conclusion

This study has explored the level of awareness of ‘dyslexia’ among private school teachers. The major finding emerging from this study is that the private school teachers of district Shaheed Benazirabad lack knowledge about dyslexia. The findings of this article carry the notion that the lack of knowledge among school teachers regarding the term Dyslexia puts the affected students at threat of being depressed and expelled from academic as well as society.

Recommendation

Since dyslexia is a hidden disability, most frequently found in school children, if left undiagnosed at early stages, it can lead children to face social, emotional as well as academic challenges. Therefore, educational institutions must take some initiatives such as organizing different workshops each year for teachers’ awareness about dyslexia, its signs and symptoms, and intervention strategies to reduce the rate of dyslexia in children. Teachers should apply different teaching methodologies, such as the repetition of lectures, to assist affected children. If a teacher notices any sign or symptom in a child, for instance, poor reading skills, then he is not supposed to get angry or punish or label him as a dull or weak child rather he should treat him with love and kindness and try to overcome his problems by giving him extra time for doing tasks, or suggesting him alternative ways of doing things such as homework, assignments and so on

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