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KNOWLEDGE AND ATTITUDE OF TEACHERS TOWARDS STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN RIVERS STATE

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Abstract
The study investigated the knowledge and attitude of teachers towards pupils with learning disabilities in secondary schools in Rivers State. The survey research design using a cross-sectional approach was adopted. Twelve (12) specific objectives and twelve (12) corresponding research questions guided the study with twelve (12) null hypotheses tested at 0.05 alpha level. The population for the study consisted of 10200 teachers from all government-owned secondary schools in 12 selected Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Rivers State. The sample size was 480 teachers from secondary schools in 12 selected LGAs in the three Senatorial Districts of Rivers State. A modified and validated Teachers' Knowledge and Attitude Questionnaire (TKAQ) was used as the instrument for data collection with reliability index of 0.68 and 0.79 for the subscales using Cronbach alpha. Descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation were used for analyzing the research questions while t-test was used to test the null hypotheses. The results showed that female teachers had higher level of knowledge about students with all the learning disabilities and also exhibited positive attitude unlike their male counterparts. Gender also significantly influenced both the knowledge and attitude of respondents in all the hypotheses tested with ($p<0.05$). The study recommended training and retraining programmes on learning disabilities with special focus on male teachers.
Keywords: Knowledge, Attitude, Teachers, Learning Disability, Rivers State

Introduction

Learning disabilities refer to a wide range of neurological disorders that affects the brain's ability to receive, process, store, and respond to information (Kantavong etal, 2010). The term is used to describe the seemingly unexplained difficulty a person has in acquiring basic academic skills and coping with the social process. The National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities-(NJCLD, 1980) observed that children with learning disabilities are children with a heterogeneous group of disorders manifested by significant difficulties in the acquisition and use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning, or mathematical abilities. These disorders are intrinsic to the individual and presumed to be due to Central Nervous System Dysfunction. Even though a learning disability may occur concomitantly with other handicap conditions such as sensory impairment, intellectual disability, social and emotional disturbance or environmental influences like cultural differences, insufficient/inappropriate instruction, psychogenic factors, it is not the direct result of those conditions or influences. In other words, the situation of learning disabilities indicates a discrepancy between a student's apparent capacity to learn and his or her level of achievement. Similarly, the preponderance of case of learning disabilities is triggered by the dysfunction

of the central nervous system which heightens the problem or difficulty in understanding and diagnosing learning disability.

Similarly, National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (2011) defined learning disabilities as a significantly reduced ability to understand new or complex information, to learn new skills (impaired intelligence), with a reduced ability to cope independently (impaired social functioning), which started before adulthood. Individuals with Disabilities Education Act-(IDEA, 1990) describes children with learning disabilities as children with disorders in one or more basic psychological processes involved in the understanding or use of language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations. These disorders adversely affect their academic achievements and as such, imply that special attention is required for children with learning disabilities to cope with their contemporaries academically.

UNESCO (2009) stated that learning disabilities (LDs) is a general term that refers to a group of disorders which are due to identifiable or inferred central nervous system dysfunction, which may be manifested by delays in early development and/or difficulties in any of the following areas: attention, memory, reasoning, co-ordination, communicating, spelling, calculation, social competence, and emotional maturation. In this regard LDs are intrinsic to the individual and may affect learning and behaviour whether they are average or above-average intelligence. Learning disabilities are not due primarily to visual, hearing, motor or cognitive impairments, or to emotional disturbance or environmental disadvantage. Learning disabilities may arise from genetic or bio-chemical factors or events resulting in neurological impairment. Learning disabilities are not primarily the result of: sensory impairment, physical challenges, developmental delay, emotional disturbance, and environmental influences (UNESCO, 2009).

Guyit etal (2016) observed that a person with learning disability have problems with learning certain life skills. Although, the problems experienced vary from person to person, it may include aspects such as learning new things, communication, managing money, reading, writing, or personal care. Some people are born with a disability, whereas others may develop one as a result of an accident or illness in childhood. Types of learning disabilities differ hugely. Someone with mild disabilities may be able to live independently with minimal support, whereas someone with severe and profound disabilities may require 24hour care, and help with performing most daily living skills.

Oluka and Okorie (2014) emphasized that learning disabilities arise from a situation where pupils and students find it very difficult to explore their emotional, physical, social, and intellectual capabilities and potentials which could inspire their learning or schooling performances. The difficulty may be singularly or jointly related to mental, cognitive, psycho-social factors. Thus, in some circumstances gifted and talented persons with high or average intelligence could be confronted with special needs like: hearing impairment, visual, speech and language impairment, orthopaedic impairment, social maladjustment, learning disabilities and multiple impairments. Also, learners with distinct learning frailty require expert identification, intervention and special care from trained professionals. Furthermore, Reiff etal (2013) defined learning disabilities (otherwise learning disorders) as a collection of maladies likely to distort the optimal utilization of diverse academic and functional skills including the ability to speak, listen, read, write, spell, reason, organize information, and do math.

Sawhney and Bansal (2014) see learning disabilities as delays, aberrations and discrepancies in learners' performance in rudimentary academic subjects like arithmetic, reading, writing, spelling and speech. These deviations which trigger disparities in learning cannot alone be attributed to mental retardation,

sensory deficits, or emotional disturbances, but on variety of different conditions that could undermine educational advancement. Unfortunately, due to lack of awareness among teachers, parents and school authorities' majority of these learners are never identified with issues that make learning difficult or unattainable for them; rather they are commonly labeled as slow, behind, incapable and failures. Consequently, the central focus of learning disabilities involves specific learning and cognition disorders that can intrinsically and significantly affect the academic and performance outcomes to both pupils and students. Learning disabilities may occur in combination with other disabling conditions, but they are not due primarily to other conditions, such as intellectual disability, behavioural disturbance, lack of opportunities to learn, or primary sensory deficits *(Bradley et al, 2010).*

Salami (2013) reiterates that any condition that affects the brains' ability to receive, process, analyze or store information that aids knowledge acquisition could be termed learning disability which makes it tough for the learners to speedily learn like their normal colleagues. Similarly, certain kinds of learning disabilities such as hyperactivity and attention disorders can cause the continuous mind wobbling that heightens inattentiveness during school activities. Also, he noted that these situations may pose great challenge to the teacher in an inclusive classroom with a target of ensuring that every student learn at their pace. Adams (2012) defined learning disability as a classification that includes several areas of functioning in which a person has difficulty learning in a typical manner, usually caused by an unknown factor or factors. Given the "difficulty learning in a typical manner", this does not exclude the ability to learn in a different manner. Therefore, some pupils and students can be more accurately described as having a "learning difference", thus avoiding any misconception of being disabled with a lack of ability to learn and possible negative stereotyping.

Oluranti (2014) stated that learning disabilities can be academic (i.e. related to academic activities) or developmental (those related to activities needed to perform academic tasks e.g. attention, memory etc.). Also, whether academic or developmental learning disabilities, they curtail, limit or inhibit the rate at which pupils and students lose their reading, writing, comprehension and numeracy skills and capabilities including scientific reasoning and empiricism. This is indeed paramount because the inability to read written or printed materials is a common feature of learning disabilities. Pierangelo and Giulian (2006) argued that reading difficulties are easily observable problem that could hamper the academic performance of challenged pupils and students. Lemer and kline (2006) also found that at least 80% of learners with disability encounter hitches in reading.

Gifted education is handled separately in most developed countries, whereas in developing countries like Nigeria, the prevailing large class size and seemingly non-existent special schools (to carter with learners with special needs) make educators to modify teaching strategies and environments so that the maximum or totality of pupils and students (those with learning ability and those with learning disabilities) are served, taught and handled in general or inclusive education environments (Stainback & Stainback, 2007). Obani (2006) stressed that students with special educational needs are exceptional people who may be exposed to learning difficulties and other forms of special needs. However, these students require individually planned and systematically monitored measures like separate classes and materials, special teaching procedures and other interventions that aid students' achievement of independence, self-sufficiency, academic success and self-fulfillment (Oluka & Okorie, 2014). Education for persons with special educational needs Act 2004 of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 2013) defines special educational needs as a restraint in the aptitude of individuals to participate in and benefit from teaching

and learning processes upon enduring physical, sensory, mental health and other conditions which results in a person opting to learn differently from another without that condition. Hence, special educational needs are synonymous with disability, impairment and handicap (Egunjobi, 2013).

Although, learning disability, learning disorder and learning difficulty are often used interchangeably, they differ in many ways. In this regard, Adams (2012) sees disorder as significant learning or academic problems that don't warrant any official diagnosis. On the other hand, learning disabilities entails an official clinical diagnosis, whereby the individual meets certain criteria, under the direction of a professional (like psychologist, pediatrician, etc.). Conversely, Lere (2010) and Nwokolo (2008) opined that pupils and students with learning disabilities are those who though may have no obvious incapacity, yet are unable to perform and achieve academically, socially, emotionally and even physically. Nwokolo (2008) further stressed that these learners may at different times manifest an array of symptoms including: difficulties in mathematics, reading, writing, spelling, comprehension, memorizing and reasoning skills. Accordingly, they are simply detected by their inability to attend and concentrate; poor motor skills during writing, lack of fluency in reading and other related activities. This culminate to students with learning challenges to encounter difficulty in areas like Mathematics, science, Social Studies, English language, and in virtually all other studies (Abolarin, 2012). Lerner and Kline (2007) stated that this disparity in assimilating what is learned might probably result to repeated and obvious failure and emotional problems which disturb and desterilizes students who see their peers outperforming them. Furthermore, some pupils and students with learning disabilities have difficulty in making and keeping friends, and socializing with their peers in a regular classroom, this is thus a social problem that will definitely impede their performance, interest and functionality alongside effectively communicating, processing information, remembering things and organizing their thoughts (National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke, 2011; Dada & Eni-Olorunda, 2014).

Despite the differences in the form, prevalence and manifestation; learning disabilities occurs due to the many disorders, reasoning, articulation, numeracy, spelling, writing, behavioural, and complex difficulties including hyperactivity issues confronting pupils and students with learning disabilities makes the expected teacher attention to these learners often fraught with great difficulty. Corroborating this view, Salami (2013) affirms that teachers in inclusive schools (where students with or without disability come together to learn but with learning aid provided for such students with disabilities) have to be familiar with the several disorders which limits challenged learners ability to receive, sort, process, store and retrieve information easily like those learners without learning disabilities do. Consequently, the expectation of integration and academic achievement will continue to elude our conventional schools, except teachers patiently teach and redirect those with learning disabilities in order to prevent their challenges from permeating into their lifestyles. Hence, the attainment of this speedily facilitates each learner realization of their reading, writing and spelling goals.

Related services include developmental, corrective, and other supportive services as are required to assist a student with special needs and includes speech and language pathology, audiology, psychological services, physical therapy, occupational therapy, counseling services, including rehabilitation counseling, orientation and mobility services, medical services as defined by regulations, parent counseling and training, school health services, school social work, assistive technology services, other appropriate developmental or corrective support services, appropriate access to recreation and other appropriate support services (Jones, 2009). For example, students who have autistic spectrum disorders, poor impulse

control, or other behavioral challenges may learn self-management techniques, be kept closely on a comfortingly predictable schedule, or given extra cues to signal activities (Geva & Wiener, 2015).

Obani (2006) projected that about fifty percent of pupils and students across different schools in Nigeria are confronted with different category of learning disabilities. Besides, the heterogeneous nature of the condition makes it challenging to teachers in most regular basic classrooms in Nigeria. This situation or scenario could make it difficult, challenging or problematic for pupils and students (learners) with special needs or learning disability to quickly and effectively learn like their counterparts or contemporaries without any disability in an inclusive classroom. Accordingly, Salami (2013) reiterate that hyperactivity and attention disorders can emotionally destabilize, disorganize, disorient, disrupt or weaken pupils and students intellectual reasoning, articulation, mental alertness, level of concentration, socialization and activity as basis, fundamentals or requisites for pupils and students' academic progress and performance in both curricular and extracurricular activities, learning and instructional delivery processes that take place in and out of the classroom or school environment.

Bos and Vaughn (2005) stated that common special needs include learning disabilities (such as dyslexia), communication disorders, emotional and behavioral disorders (such as ADHD), physical disabilities (such as osteogenesis imperfecta, cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy, spina bifida, and Friedreich's ataxia), and developmental disabilities (such as autism spectrum disorders and intellectual disability). Pupils and students with these kinds of special needs are likely to benefit from additional educational services such as different approaches to teaching, the use of technology, a specifically adapted teaching area, or a resource room. Children with disabilities are often denied their right to education. However, little is known about their school attendance patterns. The collection of data on children with disabilities is not straightforward, but data are vital to ensure that policies are in place to address the constraints these pupils and students face (UNESCO, 2010; 2014; Eleweke & Rodda, 2010).

Beverly and York-Barr (2010) emphasized that the issue of pupils and students with learning disabilities aided or heightened the inception and intervention of special needs education for this exceptional situation. Special needs education is the practice of educating students in a way that addresses their individual differences and needs. Ideally, this process involves the teacher (either in the primary or secondary school) adopting systematically planned teaching strategies to enhance the effective teaching, instruction, learning and monitoring for the individual pupil and student (i.e. learner) based on observed procedures, adapted equipment and materials, and accessible settings integrated to implement the curriculum and learning outcomes. These interventions are designed to help pupils and students (i.e. individual learners) with special needs achieve a higher level of personal self-sufficiency, intellectual development, independent learning, and success in school and in their communities which may not be available if the pupil and student were only given access to a typical classroom education.

Instructively, exceptional conditions require special interventions and consideration of the educational needs of pupils and students with learning disabilities which either prevent or hinder them from freely accessing and using diverse educational facilities provided within the classroom and school (Jha, 2002). However, Adebisi (2013) stated that the growing high proportion of ignorance and lack of legislation to pursue the implementation of inclusion, has continued to be counterproductive to deliberate attempts by the government and school administrators being accorded the requisite parental collaboration that will facilitate the smooth identification and remediation of children with special educational needs. This is due to the erroneous societal notion that pinpointing specially challenged children is stereotyping and

discriminatory. Whereas identifying them will cause the quick adoption and commencement of remedial education which aids the detection of traits that could stimulate their unpreparedness and disillusionment from schooling now transformed to the inclusion of pupils and students with or without disabilities in academic activities. For example, even people of high intelligence can be under-prepared if their education was disrupted by internal displacement during civil disorder or war (Eleweke & Rodda, 2010).

Unfortunately, Breckenridge and Vogler (2011) criticized some special education classes in an inclusive education setting as having a watered-down curriculum to effectively carter for the needs of learners. The desired results of inclusive experiences for pupils and students with learning disabilities and their families include a sense of belonging and membership, positive social relationships and friendships, and development and learning to reach their full potential. Consequently, pupils and students with learning disabilities having the opportunity to be appropriately and effectively educated in a regular classroom give them the chance to feel "like their other colleagues without learning disabilities. Hence, the goal of inclusive education remains elusive, unless all pupils and students are allowed to freely and without judgment, stigmatization or restricted access to using, equipment, materials, learning center or resource room, and engaging in activities (Adams, 2012). For instance, special technology-assisted instructional materials or devices like Braille are used to aid students that are visually impaired (Ukute & Unogwu, 2015). In the same vein, hearing aids and the use of total communication (which includes finger spelling, manual communication, and oralism (i.e. those students who had initial or residual hearing) are also other devices used to aid or enhance the learning of students with specific or special needs at the same place (classroom) and time with their fellow students without disability (Abdulkareem, 2017). In other words, the underlining fact behind the institutionalization of inclusive education is because every pupil and student expects the school to assist, support or help him/her develop skills or proficiency in using his/her tool of communication to effect the desired learning outcomes satisfactory to all (including students, parents, teachers, government and society) who benefits from educational processes, programmes or activities (Adebiyi & Abilu, 2009).

Although, the principle of inclusive education require huge budgetary allocation for the provision of equipment and materials to carter for the educational needs of learners with special educational needs. However, Abdulkareem (2017) noted that that the principle of inclusive education is slightly a deviation from the familiar norm of conventional or mainstreaming and integration in that it emphasized on the need for a “school for all” which totally blacklisted segregation and demarcation in whatever guise (Miles & Singai, 2010). This implementation of inclusive education is solely premised on the need to remove barriers to participation in learning for all learners with or without disability (Akinnyi etal, 2015). Furthermore, Ajuwon (2012) stated that the inability of the barriers or impediments hampering inclusive education to be removed is because inclusion was perceived as a classroom affair (where the teacher only considers students learning) rather than inclusion functioning as a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning cultures and communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education. Education is one of the fundamental human rights enshrined in Nigerian constitution. It is the compulsory right of every Nigerian irrespective of gender, social status, religion, colour, ethnicity or any peculiar individual challenge, designed to be an instrument for achieving National Development and social change as contained in the Nigerian National Policy on Education (Federal Republic of Nigeria-FRN, 2013). The Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council-NERDC (2019 describes education as a social instrument through which the culture

of a people is perpetuated, implemented and refined in such a way as to serve a wide range of different learning patterns irrespective of the abilities or inabilities of learners. This is in line with the national goals targeted to achieve a free and democratic society, a just and egalitarian society, a united, strong and self-reliant nation, a great and dynamic economy and a land full of opportunities for all citizens (Federal Republic of Nigeria-FRN, 2013). This implies that everyone must be allowed to explore educational opportunities that are not just age-appropriate but also suitable with his or her abilities, thus, the need for the development of a national policy on education in order to provide a blue-print through which, implementers will be guided.

The need for a National Policy on Education in Nigeria came about as a result of the 1969 National Curriculum Conference which was attended by a cross- section of Nigerians (Eskay & Oboegbulem, 2013). According to them, the conference was a culmination of expressions of general dissatisfaction with the existing education system which had become irrelevant to national needs, aspirations and goals. At the end of the Conference, a seminar consisting of educational experts and other important stakeholders convened in 1973 in order to deliberate on the framework and content of an acceptable and encompassing national policy on education. The outcome was the production of a draft copy which after necessary inputs from stakeholders including States' Ministries of Education culminated to a document referred to as the National Policy on Education, first published in 1977 and subsequently reviewed in 1981, 1998, 2004, 2007 and 2013 (Egbo, 2005). Thus, the Nigerian National Policy on Education provided for the education of all categories of persons including those with special needs as contained in Section of the policy.

The National Policy on Education describes Special Education as a customized educational programme designed to meet the peculiar needs of persons with special needs that the general education programme cannot cater for; and this includes those with visual impairment (blind & partially sighted), hearing impairment (deaf & partially hearing), physical and health impairment, intellectual disability, emotional and behavioural disorder (hyperactive, hypoactive & the socially maladjusted), speech and language impairment, learning disabilities (psychological/neurological), multiple disabilities, the gifted and talented and the Albinos (FRN, 2013). Earlier, the policy had defined special education as the education of children and adult who have learning difficulty because of different categories of handicaps, such as blindness, deafness, hardness of hearing, social maladjustment, among others, due to circumstances of birth inheritance, social position, mental and physical health pattern, or accident in later life (FRN, 2013).

The policy clearly stated that persons with special needs shall be provided with inclusive education services in schools which normal persons attend, in age appropriate general education classes directly supervised by general teachers.

The aims of special needs education are to provide access to education for all persons in an inclusive setting, equalize educational opportunities for all persons irrespective of their genetic composition, social, physical, sensory, mental, psychological or emotional disabilities, provide adequate education for all persons with special needs in order that they may fully contribute their own quota to the development of the nation, provide opportunities for exceptionally gifted and talented persons to develop their talents, natural endowments at their own pace in the interest of national development and design a diversified and appropriate curriculum for the different target groups (Ozoji, 2005).

The National Policy on Education also specified the training and retraining of all categories of teachers in the regular schools for effective implementation of the inclusive education for special needs persons such

as Braille reading and writing, mobility training, use of regular typewriter for persons with visual impairment, total communication speech technique or sign language for the hearing impaired and daily living activities or skills for persons with intellectual disability (FRN, 2013). This includes special training and retraining of the personnel to develop capacity building and to keep abreast of latest teaching techniques for the various categories of disabilities, the gifted and talented. It recommended that schools' physical structures, designs and facilities shall take into account special needs of persons with physical disabilities such as ramps, steps, wider doors for wheel chairs and lower toilets among others.

Effective implementation of inclusive education in Nigeria has remained a matter of great concern to experts as well as those affected as a result of the many challenges they often encounter in their quests to acquire knowledge. The National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities-(NJCLD, 1980) observed that children with learning disabilities are special needs children with a heterogeneous group of disorders manifested by significant difficulties in the acquisition and use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning, or mathematical abilities. Similarly, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act-IDEA (1990) describes children with learning disabilities as children with disorders in one or more basic psychological processes involved in the understanding or use of language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations. These disorders adversely affect their academic achievements and as such, imply that special attention is required for children with learning disabilities to cope with their contemporaries academically.

Consequently, segregated special schools were established in different parts of the world with experts in special needs education who have better understanding of the difficulties of children with learning disabilities in order to enhance their academic achievements (Odongo, 2012). Although, this yielded some positive results, the fact that they were segregated created room for a high level of discrimination between children in special schools and those who were educated in regular schools. This in turn, led to serious agitations by disability and parental advocacy groups for equality of access to educational opportunities at all levels irrespective of the differences in the psycho-social status of children (Dagnew, 2013).

In response to this massive outcry and in order to ensure that everyone was treated with human dignity, equity and justice, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) adopted the convention against discrimination in education in December, 1960 (UNESCO, 2009). This convention was later broadened and conceptualized as inclusive education which came into force during the 48th session of the International Conference on Education organized by UNESCO in November, 2008 at Geneva with 142 countries (Nigeria inclusive) appending their signatures to ensure education for all by the year 2015 through the enforcement of an inclusive education system at all levels. It is however, important to mention that Nigeria fully adopted the policy on inclusive education into her National Policy on Education in the year, 1998 (Fakolade et al, 2009). Since then till date, the enrolment rate of children with disabilities in regular schools has been on a steady rise. This is exacerbated by the endemic poverty profile of the country which makes it unaffordable for most parents with special needs children to educate their children in special schools.

Inclusive education refers to the practice of educating children with disabilities and their normal counterparts together in regular classrooms (Gwanshak & Milaham, 2015). It is an ongoing process aimed at offering quality education to all while respecting diversity and the different needs and abilities,

characteristics and learning expectations of the learners and communities by eliminating all forms of discrimination (UNESCO, 2009).

Study shows that teachers play pivotal roles in ensuring that inclusive education succeeds within the contemporary inclusive classrooms (Yero, 2012). It has been observed that the most difficult burden that children with disabilities bear is not that of their exceptionality, but the attitudes of people toward them, especially, those of their peers and teachers (Oluremi, 2015). Positive attitude of teachers towards children with learning disabilities will help to encourage them cope with learning tasks despite their peculiar challenges. They are required to be academically and psychologically prepared to take on the dynamic role of teaching all categories of learners without prejudice.

Regrettably in Nigeria, most regular schools lack the basic instructional facilities and qualified teachers with the needed competence to cater for the educational needs of children with learning disabilities (Dapudong, 2013). Thus, these special needs children are often neglected and despised by their teachers in regular classrooms. In a study carried out on the attitude of teachers toward the inclusion of hard of hearing students in general education classroom; it was revealed that the attitude of teachers indicated hesitancy to accept the hard of hearing (Nwazuoke, 2000). Similarly, Mittler (2000) observed that many teachers in regular schools know very little or nothing about educating children with special needs. Berry (2010) also noted that many teachers demonstrate negative attitudes to students with special needs in secondary schools. Sadly, this situation negatively affected the education and performance of children with special needs.

One of the greatest challenges of children with learning disabilities (LDs) is the attitude of people towards their condition. Teachers play pivotal roles in ensuring the effective implementation of inclusive education that will not discriminate against children with LDs. For teachers to be able to play this role effectively, they must be equipped with the basic knowledge and skills required for the education of such children. Again, the learning environment must be conducive in terms of instructional and recreational materials that are suitable for children with disabilities.

Although inclusive education has come to stay in Rivers State with virtually every school recording increased enrolments of children with different learning disabilities, it is not clear whether teachers have the basic knowledge to understand and cope with the challenges of educating children with LDs and whether they are also exhibiting the right attitude towards children with LDs in regular schools. Again, not much has been documented about the knowledge and attitude of teachers towards children with LDs in regular schools within the study area and the extent to which, this has affected the academic achievements of such children.

It is in view of the above that this study investigated the knowledge and attitude of teachers towards students with LDs in regular secondary schools in Rivers State.

Methodology

The study adopted the survey research design using a cross-sectional approach. The population for the study consisted of 10, 200 teachers from all government-owned secondary schools in twelve selected LGAs in Rivers State (Universal Basic Education Board-UBEB, 2020; Post Primary Schools Board-PPSB, 2021). **M**ulti-stage sampling technique was adopted. Firstly, Local Government Areas (LGAs) in the State were listed according to the three Senatorial Districts (Rivers East, Rivers South East & Rivers West). Random sampling procedure was used to select four (4) LGAs from each Senatorial District bringing it up to a total of twelve (12) LGAs in order to ensure spread. Purposive sampling was used to select forty (41)

teachers who currently have students with learning disabilities in their respective classes or who had handled such students within the last academic session from secondary schools in each of the selected LGAs, bringing it up to four hundred and ninety-two (492) teachers in all**.** A sample of 500 teachers was used for this study. To arrive at this, the sample size determination formula by Krejcie and Morgan, (1970) which yielded a minimum sample size of 424 was adopted. The figure was rounded up to 500 in which, only 480 copies representing 96% were retrieved and analyzed. The instrument for data collection was a modified Teacher's Knowledge and Attitude Questionnaire (TKAQ) adapted from Khan, (2011). The instrument consisted of three sections. Section A was used for the demographic data; while sections B and C contained the knowledge and attitude variables respectively, using a 4-point Likert scale of strongly agree (SA), agree (A), disagree (D) and strongly disagree (SD) respectively. The reliability coefficient index of 0.68 and 0.79 were obtained for knowledge and attitude sub-scales respectively. In order to facilitate the administration and collection of the instrument within minimum time, six (6) research assistants were trained to coordinate teachers in each of the twelve selected LGAs. The research assistants worked with the head teachers of the selected schools to ensure smooth administration and retrieval of the instrument from the teachers. Copies of the instruments served were retrieved from the sampled teachers and analyzed accordingly. Retrieved copies of the instrument were coded and analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The research questions were analyzed using descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation while t-test was used to test all the hypotheses at 0.05 alpha level of significance.

Results

Table 1: Summary of t – test analysis of teachers' knowledge about students with dyslexia in regular secondary schools in Rivers State based on gender.

Group	N	Mean	SD	Df	T cal.	p value	Decision
Female	265	3.41	0.48				
				478	3.39	.000	significant
Male	215	2.61	0.68				

Decision Rule: *if p<.05 reject H_o, else retain H_o. NS= Not Significant; S= significant*

Table1 showed that t-calculated value was 3.39 and p=.000 which is less than the level of significance (P<0.05) set for this study. Therefore, null hypothesis was rejected indicating that there was a statistically significant difference on the mean rating of teachers' knowledge about students with dyslexia in regular secondary schools in Rivers State based on gender. This confirms findings from the descriptive statistics that female teachers had better knowledge about students with dyslexia than their male counterparts.

Table 2: Summary of t – test analysis of teachers' attitude towards students with dyslexia in regular secondary schools in Rivers State based on gender.

Group	N	Mean	SD	Df	T cal	p value	Decision
Female	265	3.04	0.67				
				478	3.81	.000	significant
Male	215	2.37	0.77				

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Results from table 2 showed that the calculated t – value was 3.81 and p = (0.000) which is less than the level of significance set for this study (P<0.05). Thus, null hypothesis was rejected. This indicated that there was a statistically significant difference on the attitude of teachers towards students with dyslexia in regular secondary schools in Rivers State based on gender.

Table 3: Summary of t – test analysis of teachers' knowledge about students with dyscalculia in regular secondary schools in Rivers State based on gender.

Group	N	Mean	SD	Df	T cal	p value	Decision
Female	265	3.43	0.53				
				478	3.52	.000	Significant
Male	215	3.09	0.72				

Table 4.15 revealed that the calculated t – value of was 3.52 and p = .000 which is less than the level of significance set for this study (P<0.05). Therefore, null hypothesis was rejected indicating that there was a statistically significant difference on the mean rating of teachers' knowledge about students with dyscalculia in regular secondary schools in Rivers State based on gender.

Table 4: Summary of t – test analysis of teachers' attitude towards students with dyscalculia in regular secondary schools in Rivers State based on gender.

Group	N	Mean	SD	Df	T cal	p value	Decision
Female	265	3.37	0.63				
				478	3.78	.000	Significant
Male	215	2.34	0.91				

Results from table 4 showed that the calculated t – value was 3.78 with p-(0.000). Therefore, null hypothesis was rejected since (p<0.05) was less than the level of significance. This indicated that was a statistically significant difference on the mean rating of teachers' attitude towards students with dyscalculia in regular secondary schools in Rivers State based on gender.

Table 5: Summary of t – test analysis of teachers' knowledge about students with dysgraphia in regular secondary schools in Rivers State based on gender.

Group	N	Mean	SD	Df	T cal	p value	Decision
Female	265	3.26	0.57				
				478	3.74	.000	significant
Male	215	2.41	0.72				

Results from table 5 revealed that the calculated t – value was 3.74 and p = .000 at 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, null hypothesis was rejected indicating that there was a statistically significant difference on the mean rating of teachers' knowledge about students with dysgraphia in regular secondary schools in Rivers State based on gender.

Table 6: Summary of t – test analysis on teachers' attitude towards students with dysgraphia in regular secondary schools in Rivers State based on gender.

Group	N	Mean	SD	Df	T cal	p value	Decision
Female	265	3.31	0.64				
				478	3.90	.000	significant

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Male	215	2.41	0.72				

Results from table 6 showed that the calculated t – value was 3.90 and p=0.000 which is less than the level of significance (p<0.05) set for this study. Null hypothesis was therefore rejected. This indicated that there was a significant difference on the mean rating of teachers' attitude towards students with dysgraphia in regular secondary schools in Rivers State based on gender.

Table 7: Summary of t – test analysis of teachers' knowledge about students with dyspraxia in regular secondary schools in Rivers State based on gender.

Group	N	Mean	SD	Df	T cal	p value	Decision
Female	265	3.14	0.70				
				478	2.65	.008	significant
Male	215	2.87	0.75				

Result from table 7 revealed that the calculated t – value was 2.65 with p (0.008) which is less than the level of significance (p<0.05) set for this study. This indicated that there was a significant difference on the knowledge of teachers about students with dyspraxia in regular secondary schools in Rivers State based on gender.

Table 8: Summary of t – test analysis of teachers' attitude towards students with dyspraxia in regular secondary schools in Rivers State based on gender.

Group	N	Mean	SD	Df	T cal	p value	Decision
Female	265	3.28	0.64				
				478	3.58	.000	significant
Male	215	2.44	0.69				

Results from table 8 indicated that the calculated t – value of 3.58 with p(.000) at 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, null hypothesis was rejected indicating that there was a significant difference in the attitude of teachers towards students with dyspraxia in regular secondary schools in Rivers State based on gender.

Table 9: Summary of t – test analysis of teachers' knowledge about students with dysphasia in regular secondary schools in Rivers State based on gender.

Group	N	Mean	SD	Df	T cal	p value	Decision
Female	265	3.46	0.54				
				478	3.83	.000	significant
Male	215	3.00	0.97				

Table 9 showed that the calculated t – value was 3.83 with p=.000 which is less than 0.05 level of significance set for this study. Therefore, null hypothesis was rejected in favour of the alternate hypothesis. This indicated that there was a statistically significant difference in the knowledge of teachers about students with dysphasia in regular secondary schools in Rivers State based on gender.

Table 10: Summary of t – test analysis of teachers' attitude towards students with dysphasia in regular secondary schools in Rivers State based on gender.

Group	N	Mean	SD	Df	T cal.	p value	Decision
Female	265	3.44	0.58				
				478	3.51	.000	significant
Male	215	2.31	0.80				

Results from table 10 revealed that the calculated t – value was 3.51 and p-value of (.000) at 0.05 level of significance. Null hypothesis was therefore rejected indicating that there was a statistically significant difference in the attitude of teachers towards students with dysphasia in regular secondary schools in Rivers State based on gender. This implied that, female teachers displayed better attitude towards students with dysphasia when compared with their male counterparts.

Table 11: Summary of t – test analysis of teachers' knowledge about students with ADHD in regular secondary schools in Rivers State based on gender.

Group	N	Mean	SD	Df	T cal	p value	Decision
Female	265	3.61	0.49				
				478	3.93	.000	significant
Male	215	3.13	0.60				

Table 11 showed that the calculated t – value was 3.93. Again, p-value was (.000) which is less than the level of significance set for this study ($p<0.05$). Thus, null hypothesis was rejected in favour of the alternate hypothesis. This indicated that there was a significant difference on teachers' knowledge about students with ADHD in regular secondary schools in Rivers State based on gender.

Table 12: Summary of t – test analysis of teachers' attitude towards students with Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder-ADHD in regular secondary schools in Rivers State based on gender.

Group	N	Mean	SD	Df	T cal.	p value	Decision
Female	265	3.21	0.52				
				478	3.68	.000	significant
Male	215	2.38	0.90				

Table 12 revealed that the calculated t – value was 3.68 with a p-value of .000 at 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, null hypothesis was rejected in line with the decision rule. This indicated that there was a statistically significant difference in the attitude of teachers towards students with Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder-ADHD in regular secondary schools in Rivers State based on gender. This implied that, female teachers displayed better attitude towards students with ADHD when compared with their male counterparts.

Discussion of Findings

Findings from the study revealed that gender plays a crucial role in determining the knowledge and attitude of teachers towards students with learning disabilities with ($P<0.05$) in all the hypotheses tested. Another striking aspect from the outcome of this study was the fact that female teachers had higher knowledge about students with LDs and exhibited more positive attitude towards them with higher mean scores in all the research questions considered.

These findings are in line with the findings of Aladwani and Shaye (2015) that female teachers were more knowledgeable that students who had written language and reading problems (dyslexia) such as reading very slowly and painfully, having trouble with spelling, cannot easily recall words and cannot easily decode errors than the male teachers who had no suspicion that the non-performance of the children was as a result of an underlying disorder. Again, Sawhney and Bansal (2016) agree that gender plays a serious role in the handling of students with learning disabilities due to the relatively careful observant nature of female teachers. The implication of this to practice is that female teachers are more likely to exhibit

positive attitude towards students with this learning disability when compared with their male counterparts.

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