

## **GENDER DIFFERENCES IN TEACHERS' KNOWLEDGE AND ATTITUDE TOWARDS THEIR ROLES IN THE EDUCATION OF STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES IN IBADAN**

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### **Abstract**

*This study investigated gender differences in regular and special education teachers' knowledge of their roles and attitude towards their roles in the education of students with learning disabilities in regular classrooms. Descriptive survey research was used and a multi-stage sampling procedure was adopted for the study. One hundred and forty-eight (148) regular and special education teachers were selected from ten secondary schools in Ibadan, Nigeria for the study. Three instruments were used to collect data. Two hypotheses were generated and tested using descriptive statistics of frequency counts and percentages and inferential statistics of t-test at 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that there was no significant gender difference in the knowledge of the roles of regular and special education teachers in the education of students with learning disabilities. However, a significant gender difference in the attitude of teachers towards their roles in the education of students with learning disabilities. The result further showed that female regular and special education teachers obtained a more positive attitude towards their roles than male regular and special education teachers in the education of students with learning disabilities. Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended that teachers should endeavour to translate knowledge about instructional roles into action to promote quality education among students with learning disabilities. Male teachers should emulate the patience and care of female teachers in order to effectively teach students with learning disabilities in regular classrooms.*

**Keywords:** *Teachers' knowledge of roles, attitude, teachers' roles, learning disabilities, regular classrooms*

### **Introduction**

The global trend towards inclusion has contributed immensely to the dramatic changes occurring in the way services for students with special needs such as those with learning disabilities are provided. Nowadays majority of students with learning disabilities receive their education in regular classrooms alongside their peers without learning disabilities. The idea is that regular teachers can meet the needs of students with learning disabilities with support from special education teachers trained to teach students with learning disabilities. Lazarus (2016) explained that students with learning disabilities are those students whose exceptional characteristics such as difficulties processing visual and auditory information, memory difficulties, reading, oral and written language difficulties, place at a disadvantaged position despite having normal intelligence.

Most secondary school students with learning disabilities experience school failure resulting from difficulties in basic academic skills such as reading, writing and mathematics. Many of the students show lack of motivation to learn and experience problems in cognitive and metacognitive areas (Lazarus, 2016). Consequently, students with learning disabilities perform poorly in their academics and the rate of school dropout is on the increase among the population. Therefore, both regular and special education teachers are required to understand the students' unique needs and characteristics as well as exhibit high level of commitment towards their diverse roles and duties. Good knowledge of teachers' roles would enhance quality education for students with learning disabilities.

Teachers function in different capacities in regular classrooms. The goal is to ensure that all learners obtain quality education that will lead to independent living and sustainable national development. According to the National Policy on Education by the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FGN) (2013) two main specific goals of education in Nigeria are to ensure and sustain unfettered access and equity to education for the total development of the individual and to ensure the quality of education delivery at all levels. These goals align with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) which is geared towards ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and the promotion of lifelong learning opportunities for all (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, 2017). The SDG 4 can be fully achieved if teachers of all learners including students with learning disabilities understand what their roles are towards these students and fulfill these roles. When a teacher fails to recognize his or her roles to students with learning disabilities in regular classrooms, he will not only become inefficient but also incapable of promoting quality education among students with learning disabilities.

Friend (2011) endorsed the use of universal design for learning, differentiated instruction and positive behavioural supports for teaching students with diverse educational needs. To differentiate instruction, regular and special education teachers need to understand how to design an individualized education plan (IEP) and how to use the IEP to implement developmentally appropriate instruction for students with learning disabilities. Regular teachers serve on the IEP team to provide firsthand information about the students while SETs engage students with learning disabilities in individualized instruction (at a ratio of one teacher to one student, or a teacher to three students). Kilmartin (2018) explained that in addition to providing instruction to small groups of students, SETs also monitor, summarize and evaluate the acquisition of the outcomes stated in the IEP of students with special needs. Dettmer, Knackendoffel and Thurston (2013) explained that individual teachers must recognize the roles other teachers should perform as well as his/her own personal roles within the school system. When teachers understand their roles and the roles of other teachers, they will be able to engage in effective collaboration, a feature that leads to better learning outcomes for all learners including those with learning disabilities.

Ideally, regular and special education teachers share responsibility in teaching students with learning disabilities in the regular classroom. So, regular and special education teachers need to know their roles to avoid role confusion. Wiggins (2012) affirmed that teachers who are not certain about their roles cannot be able to provide effective instruction. It then means that all teachers need to have good knowledge of their roles in order to meet the needs of the students. Vlachou, Didaskolu and Kontofryou (2015) found that special support teachers in Greece secondary schools believed that they served multiple roles such as assessment and identification of pupils' needs, planning of instruction, instruction and monitoring of pupils. In addition, the study alleged that there was some level of role ambiguity, expectations were confused, and there was no collaboration among professionals. In a study by Al-Zboon (2016) it was discovered that special education teachers had little experience of leadership roles. Mainly, SETs considered providing cognitive and emotional support to colleagues as their most important leadership role whilst they perceived participation in interview committees and in the selection of new teachers as the least important.

Gender differences in teachers' attitude towards their roles in the education of students with learning disabilities were also examined in this study. Attitudes predispose individuals to actions that have some degree of consistency and can be evaluated as either negative or positive (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; McMillen, Seastrom, Gruber, McGrath & Cohen, 2000). A positive attitude towards all students in the regular classroom irrespective of the learning challenges of the students will contribute immensely towards the high

levels of academic achievement and overall benefits of schooling obtained by the students. Positive attitudes displayed by teachers and entire school staff will encourage the attainment of inclusive and equitable quality education for all learners particularly those with learning disabilities. Vaz, Wilson, Falkmer, Sim, Scott and Cordier (2015) examined primary school teachers' attitudes towards inclusion of students with all disabilities in regular schools in Western Australia and the factors associated with teachers' attitudes towards inclusion. The findings showed that four teacher attributes (age, gender, teaching self-efficacy and training) collectively explained 42 per cent of the variability in teachers' attitude toward including students with disabilities.

Alharthi and Evans (2017) studied the attitudes of SETs towards teaching students with learning disabilities in regular classrooms and found that the attitudes of SETs towards inclusive education were positive and that no significant differences existed between teachers' attitudes based on their gender. On the other hand, Ogunsola (2017) argued that within the Nigerian school setting, some teachers demonstrate negative attitudes towards students with learning disabilities in their classrooms. Also, negative teachers' attitudes toward teaching students with learning disabilities in the regular classroom have been documented in the professional research literature (deBoer, Pijil and Minnaert, 2011). Such attitudes tend to compound the problems of students with learning disabilities.

A study by Wong and Hanafi (2007) investigated gender differences in attitudes towards information technology among 73 female and 29 male student teachers in Univesiti Putra Malaysia, Malaysia. Their result did not reveal significant differences between female and male student teachers' attitudes toward the usage of Information Technology (IT) related tools and applications. Throndsen and Turmo (2012) conducted a study on differences in male and female teachers' beliefs about mathematics instruction and reported that teachers had good mastery of their subject and instructional approaches. However, female teachers had somewhat higher levels of mastery goals for students and mastery approaches to instruction, while male teachers had a somewhat higher level of performance approaches to instruction. By inference, the teachers were knowledgeable about their roles. Also, the teachers had high personal teaching efficacy to complement their mastery goals. Furthermore, the findings of a study conducted in Tanzania by Moses, Admiraal and Berry (2016) showed that there was no significant relationship between gender and commitment of teachers to teaching. Wanakacha, Aloka and Nyaswa (2018) also examined gender differences in teacher motivation and performance of the core functions in Kenyan secondary schools. The findings showed no gender difference on both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation of teachers to perform their core functions.

Throndsen and Turmo (2012) evinced that female teachers appear to be more student-centred and supportive of students than male teachers. Female teachers also tend to adopt class discussion method more often than male teachers and encourage collaborative learning practices. In line with this position, Lee, Rhee and Rudolf (2017) examined the relationship among teacher gender, student gender and performance level. The findings revealed that in terms of teaching style female teachers achieved higher than male teachers. This high level of achievement among female teachers exerted considerable influence on the achievement of male and female students.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Past studies have confirmed that when regular and special education teachers have adequate knowledge of their roles and possess positive attitude towards educating all students the academic achievement and growth of students improve. However, the extent of gender difference in teachers' knowledge of roles and teachers' attitude towards their roles in the education of secondary school students with learning disabilities is not yet

known especially in the study locale (Ibadan, Nigeria). Therefore, this study investigated gender differences in teachers' knowledge of roles and teachers' attitude towards their roles in the education of secondary school students with learning disabilities in Ibadan, Nigeria.

### **Hypotheses**

The following null hypotheses generated in the study were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

- Ho<sub>1</sub>: There is no significant difference in the knowledge of male and female regular and special education teachers about their roles in the education of students with learning disabilities in regular classrooms.
- Ho<sub>2</sub>: There is no significant difference in male and female regular and special education teachers' attitude towards their roles in the education of students with learning disabilities in regular classrooms.

### **Methodology**

#### **Population**

The population of this study was all regular and special education teachers in secondary schools in Ibadan metropolis, Oyo State, Nigeria.

#### **Sample and Sampling Technique**

The sample for the study comprised one hundred and forty-eight regular and special education teachers (148) who teach students with learning disabilities. The multi-stage sampling procedure was adopted to select the study sample. First, ten secondary school in Ibadan metropolis, Oyo State, were randomly selected for the study. Then purposive sampling technique was used to select both regular and special education teachers from the ten schools. The selection criterion was that the participating regular or special education teacher has at least one student with learning disabilities in his regular classroom. To determine whether students in regular classrooms have learning disabilities or not, teachers were asked to nominate students with academic and behavioural difficulties. Afterwards, the Slosson Intelligence Test (SIT) was administered to the students and then an adapted version of the Learning Disabilities Screening Inventory was used to screen the nominated students for academic and behavioural difficulties in order to identify those who experience learning disabilities.

The distribution of participants according to gender reveals that out of the 148 participants, 77 (52.0%) were males while 71 (48.0%) were females. This shows that majority of the participants were males. The distribution of participants according to current teaching status reveals that 105 (70.9%) were regular teachers while 43 (29.1%) were special education teachers. This shows that majority of the participants were regular teachers. The distribution of participants according to educational qualification shows that out of the 148 participants, 36 (24.3%) had the Nigeria Certificate in Education/Ordinary National Diploma (NCE/OND), 11 (7.4%) had Higher National Diploma (HND), 89 (60.2%) had Bachelor's degree while 12 (8.1%) had Master's degree. This shows that majority of the participants had Bachelor's degree.

In addition, the distribution of participants according to years of teaching experience reveals that 43 (29.0%) had between less than 1 year and 10 years of teaching experience, 71 (48.0%) had between 11 and 19 years while 34 (23.0%) had between 20 and 30 years of teaching experience. This shows that majority of the participants had between 11 and 19 years of teaching experience. The distribution of participants according to area of specialization reveals that 27 (18.2%) were in science, 49 (33.1%) were in arts while 72 (48.7%) were in social science. The age distribution of participants shows that 63 (42.6%) were between the ages of 25 and 35 years while 85 (57.4%) were above 35 years. This shows that majority of the participants were

above 35years of age. This shows that majority of the participants were in social science. Demographic information of the participants is presented in table 1.

**Table 1 Demographic Data of Participants**

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	77	52.0
Female	71	48.0
<b>Total</b>	148	100.0
<b>Teaching Status</b>		
Regular teacher	105	70.9
Special education teacher	43	29.1
<b>Total</b>	148	100.0
<b>Educational Qualification</b>		
NCE/OND	36	24.3
HND	11	7.4
Bachelor's degree	89	60.2
Master's degree	12	8.1
<b>Total</b>	148	100.0
<b>Teaching Experience</b>		
0-10years	43	29.0
11-19years	71	48.0
20-30years	34	23.0
<b>Total</b>	148	100.0
<b>Area of Specialization</b>		
Science	27	18.2
Arts	49	33.1
Social science	72	48.7
<b>Total</b>	148	100.0
<b>Age</b>		
25-35years	63	42.6
Above 35years	85	57.4
<b>Total</b>	148	100.0

### **Instrumentation**

Three instruments were used to collect data for the study. The first and second instruments were used to screen students (for learning disabilities) in the regular classrooms of teachers who participated in the study. These are the Slosson Intelligence Test and the adapted version of the Learning Disabilities Screening Inventory (alpha =0.63) (Lazarus & Ntamark, 2016). Both instruments were used to screen for learning disabilities. The third instrument was designed by the researcher and tagged "Questionnaire on Knowledge and Attitude of Professionals towards Education of Students with Learning Disabilities (QKAPESLD)". This instrument has four sections as follows: biodata, knowledge of instructional roles (15 items); knowledge of leadership roles (10 items) and attitude of teachers towards their roles (10 items). In all, there are 35 questions

measuring different aspects of the study theme. The QKAPESLD was pilot tested and it yielded a reliability coefficient using Cronbach alpha of 0. 79.

**Method of data analysis**

The data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics of frequency counts and percentages; and inferential statistics of t-test.

**Results**

**Hypotheses Testing**

Ho<sub>1</sub>: There is no significant difference in the knowledge of male and female regular and special education teachers about their roles in the education of students with learning disabilities in regular classrooms.

Table 2 t-test table showing gender difference in the knowledge of roles of professionals

Gender	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	T	Df	P
Male	77	36.63	5.20	0.27	1.67	146	0.09
Female	71	36.90	4.99				

Table 2 revealed that there is no significant gender difference in the knowledge of roles of regular and special education teachers of students with learning disabilities (t=1.67, df= 146, p>.05). However, the table also showed that females had a higher mean score (36.90) while males had a mean score of (36.63) representing anon-statistically significant mean difference of 0.27 between males and females.

Ho<sub>2</sub>: There is no significant difference in male and female regular and special education teachers' attitude towards their roles in the education of students with learning disabilities in regular classrooms.

Table 3 t-test table showing gender difference in the attitude of professionals towards their roles in the education of students with learning disabilities

Gender	N	Mean	Std. Dev	t-cal	Df	P
Male	77	10.14	2.12	9.28	146	0.00
Female	71	11.75	2.11			

Table 3 revealed that there is a significant gender difference in the attitudes of regular and special education teachers towards their roles in the education of students with learning disabilities (t=9.283, df= 146, p<.05). The table showed a mean difference of 1.605 between males and females. The table also showed that females had a higher mean score (11.75) while males had a mean score of (10.14).

**Discussion of Findings**

This study has revealed that there is no significant gender difference in the knowledge of the instructional and leadership roles of regular and special education teachers. This means that there is no significant disparity in the level of knowledge of roles of regular and special education teachers regarding the education of students with learning disabilities. This finding supports the findings of Throndsen and Turmo (2012) that revealed no statistical distinctions based on teachers' gender in teachers' mastery goals for students and mastery approaches to instruction. The present finding also agrees with the finding of Moses, Admiraal and Berry (2016) that indicated no significant relationship between teachers' gender and their commitment to

teaching. The study finding is also in consonance with Wanakacha, Aloka and Nyaswa's (2018) finding showing no gender differences on motivation of teachers to perform their core functions. Thus, male and female teachers share similar level of knowledge about instructional and leadership roles for promoting quality education among students with learning disabilities.

However, in terms of teachers' attitude towards their roles in the education of students with learning disabilities, gender differences were obtained in this study with females having higher mean score of attitudes than males. This finding negates the findings of Wong and Hanafi (2007) and that of Alharthi and Evans (2017) that reported no significant gender differences of teachers' attitudes. On the contrary in this study, females have been found to possess better disposition towards their roles in the education of students with learning disabilities. This finding is in line with the assertion of Throndsen and Turmo (2012) that suggest that female teachers tend to be more supportive, student-centred, engage in more frequent class discussions and encourage effective collaboration in the classroom. Naturally, females are more caring and patient with learners, characteristics that predispose them to higher positive attitude towards students with learning disabilities as found in this study.

### **Conclusion**

This study, thus, concluded that no significant gender difference in the knowledge of the roles of regular and special education teachers of students with learning disabilities were found. In other words, in the present study, the level of knowledge of instructional and leadership roles of regular and special education teachers does not differ significantly based on teachers' gender. However, gender differences were obtained in terms of attitude of teachers towards their roles in the education of students with learning disabilities. Female teachers showed higher positive attitudes towards their roles. The statistically insignificant gender differences in teachers' knowledge about their roles and the gender differences in teachers' attitudes towards their roles registered in this study however, serve as starting points for further research. In future studies, teachers' knowledge and attitudes towards the education of all learners with special needs should be fully explored.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the study it was recommended that:

- i. Regular and special education teachers should endeavour to translate knowledge about instructional and leadership roles into actions to promote quality education among students with learning disabilities.
- ii. Male regular and special education teachers should emulate the patience and care of female teachers in order to effectively teach students with learning disabilities in regular classrooms.
- iii. Regular and special education teachers should develop positive attitude towards students with learning disabilities in regular classrooms.
- iv. Regular and special education teachers should sensitize other professionals and paraprofessionals in regular school setting towards effective teaching of students with learning disabilities.

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