CHAPTER - III : STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

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Once the problem has been selected, stating the problem is an important task that has to be carried out. Defining the problem helps to specify the problem under study in a clear cut manner. This process helps the investigator to separate his/her study careful distinctions from other previous studies. It will also lead to find a method to arrive at the right type of conclusion. Operational definition of the terms helps to view the general problem in terms of more specific, measurable and observable variables. Hypothesis is a powerful tool in a process of research to achieve tentative solution for the problem. Hypotheses of the study with specific objectives enable to identify the variables involved in the study and suggest methodological procedures to be employed. The scope and need of the study show the worth and urgency of the study.

This chapter deals with the title of the problem, operational definition of the terms used in the study, objectives, hypotheses, scope, need and importance of the study and limitations of the study.

3.1 Title of the Problem

"Competencies Required for Primary School Teachers to handle Learning difficulties in Children".

3.2 Operational Definition of the Terms Used

Competencies:

Houstan (1987) stated that competencies are the requirements of a competency based teacher education, which included the knowledge, skills and values the student (the teacher trainee) must demonstrate for successful completion of the programme.
Selvam (1996) defined competence as referring to fitness to undertake efficiency to withstand and capacity to excel.

In the International Encyclopaedia of Education Torsten Husen T. Neville Postlethwaite (1985) defines competence as "adequate for the purpose; suitable, sufficient, or as 'legally qualified, admissible' or as capable". In a sense, it refers to adequate preparation to begin a professional career and has a direct linkage to certification requirements.

Webster’s New World College Dictionary (2000) explains competence as 'condition or quality of being competent, ability, fitness".

Weber (1972) defines competency as 'the broad sense of knowledge, attitudes, skills, and behaviours that facilitate intellectual, social, emotional and physical growth in children'.

In this study, competencies refer to the knowledge and performance skills required for the primary school teachers to handle learning difficulties in children.

**Primary School Teachers**

In this study 'primary school teachers' refer to the teachers teaching I to V standards at primary or elementary schools.

**Learning difficulties**

Webster’s Dictionary (1979) states learning as 'an acquired knowledge or skill, especially, much knowledge in a special subject; erudition'.

‘Learning disability’ is the common usage in American and 'Learning difficulty' is the normal usage in European culture. Both the terms refer to the difficulties in learning. In Indian context, Learning disabilities and Learning difficulties are synonymously used to express the difficulties that may arise due to significant difficulties in the acquisition and use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning, or mathematical abilities.
Kirk (1963), who coined the term 'Learning disabilities', defines Learning disability as a retardation, disorder or delayed development in one or more of the processes of speech, language reading, writing, arithmetic or other school subjects resulting from psychological handicap caused by a possible cerebral dysfunction and/or emotional or behavioural disturbances. It is not the result of mental retardation, sensory deprivation or cultural and instructional factors.

The National Joint Committee for Learning Disabilities (1981) defines 'Learning disabilities as a generic term that refers to 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 handicapping conditions (e.g., sensory impairment, mental retardation, social and emotional disturbance) or environmental influences (e.g., cultural differences, insufficient/appropriate instruction, psychogenic factors), it is not the direct result of those conditions or influences (Hammill, Leigh, McNutt & Larsen, 1981, P. 336)'.

These definitions of Learning disabilities explain that Learning disability is a disorder in the processes of speech, language, reading, writing, spelling, arithmetic and other school subjects. This disability is a result of psychological, neurological, emotional, behavioural and cultural abnormalities of children.

In the present study the term Learning difficulties refer to the difficulties experienced by the children to read, write, spell or to do mathematical calculations.

3.3 Objectives of the Study
The following objectives have been framed for the present study:

1. To develop a rating scale to assess the possessed competencies of primary school teachers to handle learning difficulties in children,

2. To develop a questionnaire to identify the required competencies for the primary school teachers to handle learning difficulties in children,

3. To find out the significant differences if any, in the possessed competencies of primary school teachers to handle learning difficulties in children due to variation in their gender, age, community, educational qualification, type of
training received, years of experience, type of school they are working and location of school,

4. To find out the significant differences if any in the required competencies of primary school teachers to handle learning difficulties in children due to variation in their gender, age, community, educational qualification, type of training received, years of experience, type of school they are working and location of school.

3.4 Assumptions of the Study

1. It is possible to list out the specific competencies required for primary school teachers to handle learning difficulties in children.

2. It is possible to develop a rating scale to measure the possessed competencies of primary school teachers to handle learning difficulties in children.

3. It is possible to develop a questionnaire to find the out required competencies for primary school teachers to handle learning difficulties in children.

4. The possessed and required competencies of primary school teachers to handle learning difficulties in children may vary.

3.5 Hypotheses of the Study

1. There exists significant difference in the possessed competencies of primary school teachers to handle learning difficulties in children due to variation in their gender, age, community, educational qualification, type of training received, years of experience, type of school they are working and location of school.

2. There exists significant difference in the required competencies of primary school teachers to handle learning difficulties in children due to variation in their gender, age, community, educational qualifications, type of training received, year of experience, type of school they are working and location of school.

3.6 Scope of the Study

In India, the field of special education is still in its infancy stage. Here, and there, there are schools for integrated education and separate schools for special children. The existing schools are not fully equipped in terms of human as well as
material resources to meet the diversified needs of special children. This is more true with regard to the children with special needs (learning difficulties) in normal schools. Identification and assessment procedures of children with learning difficulties are of paramount importance in educational system particularly at primary stage. Teaching and training strategies, guidance & counseling activities should be planned based on the assessed needs of these children.

In fact, the teacher plays a vital role in the identification and assessment, teaching and training and guidance & counseling activities. In this context, he / she has to perform various roles in complex situations. In other sense, the complexity of the roles to be performed by the teacher demands specific competencies to handle learning difficulties in children.

The prime focus of the study is to list out the competencies required for primary school teachers to handle learning difficulties in children. The study also aimed at development of a rating scale to assess the possessed competencies of primary school teachers to handle learning difficulties in children. It also aimed at development of a questionnaire to identify the required competencies of primary school teachers to handle learning difficulties in children. It also focuses its attention to find out the effects of the variables such as gender, age, community, educational qualification, type of training received, years of experience, type of school they are working and location of school on the possessed competencies and required competencies of primary school teachers.

3.7 Need for the Study

There is a saying, 'Teachers are born but not trained'. This is true to some extent. But even the inborn qualities should be sharpened for optimum utilisation and development. In this respect, one can admit that training is one of the indispensable component for creating competent teacher. Special education is in its infancy stage and its sub area learning difficulties is in its embryonic stage. Learning difficulties is a dynamic and expanding field. Learning difficulty individuals are found across all ages, socio-economic levels, and races and their problems range from mild to severe. At this juncture, to meet this challenge effectively, the teacher should have a thorough understanding of the nature of learning difficulties and the process of diagnosis of academic and non-academic problems emanating among children. To accomplish this task effectively, there arises a need to develop
certain competencies among teachers. As a teacher, he has to cater to the needs of this type of children with specific instructional strategies, materials, teaching techniques and approaches. At this juncture, it is essential to spell out the specific competencies for a teacher to be effective in handling children with learning difficulties. The exhaustive list of competencies required for primary school teachers about the nature of learning difficulties, causes and characteristics of learning difficulties, identification and assessment of learning difficulties, development and use of instructional strategies, utilisation of instructional materials, media & devices and guidance & counseling to the children with learning difficulties and their parents is very important. Such an exhaustive list helps to identify to what extent the teachers innately possess each competency and require that particular competency. Further, studies which probe into the effect of personal variables (gender, age, community, educational qualification, type of training received, years of experience, type of school they are working, in and location of school) on the existing and required competencies of primary school teachers to handle children with learning difficulties will go a long way to organise need based and situation oriented inservice and pre-service training programmes to the teachers. Researches which focus their attention on the above said aspects are of paramount importance.


Redden and Blackhurst (1978), Reynolds et al. (1980), and Gold Hammer, Rader and Reuschlein (1977) have identified competencies required for the teachers in the area of mainstreaming. Hudson et al. (1987) examined the literature relating to areas of competency for teachers of students with learning difficulties. Niersthemer and Susan, L. Hodges (1996) attempted to understand the pre-service teachers' belief about children experiencing difficulty in learning to read. Smith Sally (1993) presented answers to common questions on meeting the needs of students with learning disabilities. Both in Indian and foreign contexts, studies are concentrated only on learning difficulties and remedial instructions. Only limited number of studies have been conducted in India and abroad on teacher competencies in the area of leaning difficulties. As we know that the teachers play a vital role in handling learning difficulties in children. To accomplish their task effectively, they are in need of specific competencies. And it is need of the hour to have more number of studies to identify the specific competencies required for the primary school teachers to handle learning difficulties in children and the present study is an attempt in this direction.

3.8 Limitations of the Study

1. The area of the study is limited to Madurai district of Tamil Nadu State.
2. The study is confined to the teachers working in primary schools only.
3. Rating scale is the only tool to assess the possessed competencies of primary school teachers to handle learning difficulties in children.
4. Competencies are listed in the form of Questionnaire of ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ type and the required competencies for the primary school teachers to handle learning difficulties in children are identified.
5. Self ratings of the teachers are the only criteria used to assess and identify the possessed and required competencies respectively.

The Methodology used in the study are presented in the next chapter.