

# Teachers Perception of Students with Generalized Learning Disorder and Its Therapeutic Strategy

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**Abstract:** This study investigated teachers' perception of students with generalized learning disorder and its therapeutic strategy. This study was carried out in Isoko South and Ughelli North Local Government Areas of Delta State. From a population of 3,031 teachers and counsellors, 568 teachers were randomly sampled. This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The study was guided by three research questions and two hypothesis which were tested at 0.05 level of significance. The instrument for data collection was researches developed Questionnaire titled Teachers' Perception on Learning Disability Scale (TPLDS). The questionnaire was validated by three experts and internal consistency reliability coefficients of 0.89 obtained using Cronbach Alpha method. Data obtained for the study were analyzed using descriptive statistics and one-way analysis of variance. It was found that a significant difference exists between experienced and less experienced, male and female secondary school teachers in their perception of generalized learning disorder and experienced and male teachers have better understanding than their less-experienced and female counterparts. It was also found that CBT is the best strategy for managing students with generalized learning disability. Based on the above, the following recommendations were made; distinct teachers should be employed in schools; awareness programmes on learning disabilities for all school teachers; and teachers should give special attention to children and adolescents who have learning disabilities among others.

**Keywords:** Learning Disorder, Students, Generalized Learning Disorder, Therapeutic Strategy

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## 1. Introduction

Learning is a vital steady developmental process of scholarly or behavioural change that continuously effect human behaviour in a subtle way. Learning involves acquisition of knowledge and skills in diverse areas such as acquisition of information in the classroom, receiving instruction in the work-shop, football practice, typing and shorthand lesson [1]. It is the outcome of practice, a complex and vigorous procedure built upon the individual's intellectual reasoning and functioning. There are instants of individuals' not decoding information correctly hence making learning difficult for these categories of individuals. These groups of learners fall under the umbrella of learning disabilities/disorders (LD). According to Kemp et al, [2] learning incapacity is not a problem with intelligence or motivation, neither are the learners crazy nor dumb but they are as smart as anyone else. Their brains are wired differently

from others and this difference affects how they receive and process information but this disabilities may also be the malfunctioning a part of the brain which may be caused by physical damage although, difficult to prove since the damage is subtle [3]. An individual can be categorized as having a learning disability if such individual's success is not comparable with age and ability levels in one or more of the definite areas of reading, writing, mathematics, spelling, listening, and thinking when provided with learning experiences adequate for age and ability levels. This can lead to trouble with learning new ideas and skills, and putting them into practice.

The most common types of learning disabilities involve problems with reading, writing, mathematics, listening and speaking [4]. He identified some of the manifestations of the symptoms of LD to include: Dyslexia: problems with reading and comprehension, Dysgraphia: challenge in writing which can involve the physical act of writing or the

mental activity of comprehending and synthesizing information, Aphasia/Dysphasia: problems with language which is also considered an output activity because it requires organizing thoughts in the brain and calling upon the right words to verbally explain something or communicate with someone else, and Dyscalculia: difficulty with calculations that has to do with inability to understand, interpret and apply numerical information in solving problem involving calculations. For the purpose of this study, the generalized learning disorder (GLD), which was formerly known as Mental Retardation (MR) [5], is a generalized neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by significantly compromised intellectual and adaptive functioning. It is defined by an IQ under 70 in addition to deficits in two or more adaptive behaviours (conceptual, social, and practical skills) involving tasks performed that affect every day general living [6]. Intellectual functions are defined under the fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of mental disorder (DSM-V) as reasoning, problem-solving, planning, abstract thinking, judgment, academic learning, and learning from instruction and experience, and practical understanding confirmed by both clinical assessment and standardized tests [7].

Generalized Learning Disorders are learning difficulties that are expected due to physical or mental difficulties which are easily observed and identifiable [8]. They include people with learning problems due to Visual impairment, Hearing impairment, Motor handicaps, Intellectual Disability, Emotional disturbance and Environmental, cultural or economic disadvantage. Generalized learning disorders (GLD) varies from Specific Learning Difficulty/Disorder (SPLD), where the person has challenges in one area, such as in reading, writing or understanding, but has no problem with learning in other areas. Specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia, do not affect intellectual ability but generalized learning disorders does affect intellectual ability. Students with generalized learning disorders have array of needs to include weak understanding of instructions/information and curriculum vocabulary; weak short/long term memory; weak listening and concentration skills; weak organisational skills; weak literacy skills and difficulty in making links or connections between aspects of lessons and learning. Generalized learning disorder is subdivided into syndromic intellectual disability, in which intellectual deficits associated with other medical and behavioural signs and symptoms are present, and non-syndromic intellectual disability, in which intellectual deficits appear without other abnormalities [9].

The World Health Organization classifies severity of a generalized learning disorder as: Mild - 0.1-2.3 percentile, approximate IQ range of 50 to 69 (in adults, mental age from 9 to under 12 years), Moderate - 0.003-0.1 percentile, approximate IQ range of 35 to 49 (in adults, mental age from 6 to under 9 years), Severe - below 0.003 percentile, approximate IQ range of 20 to 34 (in adults, mental age from 3 to under 6 years), Profound - below 0.003 percentile, IQ under 20 (in adults, mental age below 3 years). Generalized learning disorder affects about 2 to 3% of the

general population, 65% to 90% of the affected people have mild intellectual disability, while non-syndromic or idiopathic cases account for 30 to 50% of these cases [10]. About a quarter of cases are caused by a genetic disorder and about 5% of cases are inherited from a person's parents and cases of unknown cause affect about 95 million people as of 2013 [11]. Children with generalized learning disorder find it more difficult to learn, understand and do things than other children of the same age. They can continue to learn and to make progress all through their lives but at a slower pace than other children.

Secondary school teachers have an exceptional role in identifying children with learning difficulties. Teacher's knowledge about children with generalized learning disorder helps the children to attain a standard, succeed in education and in their future developments. Several studies were reviewed on teachers' perception, knowledge and awareness about learning disabilities. Lingeswaran [12] investigated 34 primary school teachers at Puduchery to evaluate their awareness on learning disabilities using a multiple-choice questionnaire. The study reported that, only 29% of teachers were having proper awareness about learning disabilities. Shetty and Rai [13] used a self-report questionnaire on 314 elementary school teachers to find out their awareness and familiarity about dyslexia. The study concluded that 1 in 3 teachers had adequate knowledge about dyslexia while female teachers are more aware of general learning disorders and the teacher educators are not assertive in inclusive education practices. The study of Thomas [14] on Teachers' Perception on Learning Disability: An Explorative Study among Primary School Teachers in Kerala was done using an exploratory design. The sample size was 146 teachers (male 55 and female 91) selected using simple random sampling technique. The results revealed that the mean score for male was 17.69 and female was 16.26 and standard deviations were 3.84 and 3.43 respectively. The t-value is found to be 2.324 which is significant at 0.05 level. The difference in the mean scores states that, male teachers were having better perception about learning incapacity than female teachers. Menon [15] studied 500 elementary school teachers in Kerala using awareness test on learning disabilities as tool for data collection. The study concluded that, the awareness about learning disabilities among elementary school teachers were average and that experienced teachers have more understanding and awareness of generalized learning disorder. Lourdu et al. [16] carried out a study on school teachers' perception of learning disability adopting descriptive study of 52 teachers working in a secondary school in inclusive schools in Tiruchirappalli. Using simple random sampling method, 30 school teachers were selected and the study reported that the calculative value was greater than table value (.600>0.05), Hence, the gender of the respondents had no difference in their level of knowledge.

It has been reported that in Nigeria, statistics are not easily obtainable as regards the prevalence of learning difficulties or disabilities in spite of its overwhelming effects on the educational achievement and psychosocial functioning of

learners with such difficulties [17]. They examined the occurrence of specific learning incapacities and its management among pupils in Calabar educational zone, Cross River State with 400 pupils between ages 6-14 years and 200 teachers purposively sampled across 20 school. The findings revealed eight sub types of specific learning disabilities common among pupils in the sampled schools; these include dyslexia 26% (n=104), dyscalculia 18% (n=72), dysgraphia 16% (n=64), ADHD 9% (n=36), dyspraxia 15% (n=60), dysorthographia 3% (n=12), dyspinxia 8% (n=32), and dysmusia 5% (n=20). The sustained high failure rate in the internal and external school examinations might be adjudged as the evidence of learning difficulties at secondary school as well as tertiary education stage. This is because most of the secondary school students might show evidence of either dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia, among others or even comorbid of such generalized learning disabilities based on the underachievement performance exhibited. 100 pupils were screened in Calabar metropolis the result indicated that 25% has dyscalculia, 35% with dyslexia, 15% are dysgraphic, 10% has dyspraxia, attention deficit and others have 8% and 7% [18].

The studies resolved that, the teachers did not have sufficient knowledge about learning disorders. The major objective of the study was to study the secondary school teachers' perception about learning disabilities in Delta State. The study also enquired about whether any differences in perception exist between sex and educational qualification of secondary school teachers.

### 1.1. Statement of the Problem

Teachers' perceptions of students (regular education students or those identified as special education students) are not always evident. Teachers may commonly lack preparation to teach students with disabilities, which may in turn lead to a lack of acceptance of them in their classrooms. The absence of proper integration and acceptance may lead to an increased separation and ostracizing of students with disabilities in the classroom or in the school at large. Challenges to deal with students with learning disabilities as part of diverse learners require high competencies of teaching. When the teachers do not have competency, they may be more stressed.

In order to have teachers trained on this area of students learning, the need to ascertain their level of perception by creating awareness is germane, hence this study.

### 1.2. Research Questions

The following research questions are raised:

- 1) is there a difference in the perception of experienced and non-experienced secondary school teachers' on generalized learning disorder in Delta State?
- 2) is there a difference in the perception of male and female secondary school teachers' generalized learning disorder in Delta State?
- 3) is there any therapeutic strategy in managing

generalized learning disorder among secondary school students?

### 1.3. Hypotheses

The following hypotheses are formulated to guide the study.

- 1) There is no significant difference in the perception of experienced and non-experienced secondary school teachers' on generalized learning disorder in Delta State.
- 2) There is no significant difference in the perception male and female secondary school teachers' on generalized learning disorder in Delta State.

## 2. Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design which was guided by three research questions and two hypothesis, all tested at 0.05 level of significance. The population of the study is 3,031, comprising of all secondary school teachers and counsellors in Isoko South and Ughelli North Local Government Area of Delta State and a sample size of 568 teachers were selected using the simple random sampling technique. Firstly eight schools were randomly selected from the thirty schools and twenty-one respondents selected from each secondary school however, the analysis of data was based on 563 research instruments (544 teachers and 19 counsellors) that were returned. The research instrument for data collection was researcher's developed Questionnaire titled "Teachers' Perception on Learning Disability Scale" (TPLDS). This instrument was validated by three experts and a reliability coefficients of 0.89 was obtained using the Cronbach Alpha reliability method. Data obtained for the study were analyzed using descriptive statistics and one-way analysis of variance.

## 3. Presentation of Data

Research Question One: Is there a difference in the perception of generalized learning disorder among experienced and non-experienced secondary school teacher in Delta State?

**Table 1.** Descriptive Analysis of the Perception of Experienced and Non-Experienced Secondary School Teacher on Generalized Learning Disorder in Delta State.

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
Less Experienced	274	68.0135	8.21207	.95463
More Experienced	289	69.1011	9.24053	.97949
Total	563	68.6074	8.77879	.68761

From table 1 above data presented in table one, less experienced and more experienced has mean value (68.01, 69.10) and standard deviation value (8.21, 9.24). This reveals that there is difference in the perception of generalized learning disorder among experienced and non-experienced secondary school teacher in Delta State. From the result it is seen that more experienced teachers have a better perception

of generalized learning disorder among experienced and non-experienced secondary school teacher in Delta State.

Hypothesis One: There is no significant difference in the

perception of generalized learning disorder among experienced and non-experienced secondary school teacher in Delta State.

**Table 2.** One-Way Analysis of Variance of the Perception of Experienced and Non-Experienced Secondary School Teacher on Generalized Learning Disorder in Delta State.

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	47.795	1	47.795	.619	.433
Within Groups	12437.076	161	77.249		
Total	12484.871	162			

From the table 2, the ANOVA results reveals that the following values  $df = 162$ ,  $f = 0.619$ ,  $sig. = .433$  at  $p = 0.05$ . From the result the calculated value is more than the sig. value. As such the null hypothesis which states there is no significant difference in the perception of experienced and non-experienced secondary school teacher on generalized learning disorder in Delta State is hereby rejected. This means that a significant difference exists between the perception of experienced and less experienced secondary school teachers on generalized learning disorder in Delta State.

Research Question Two: Is there a significant difference in the perception of male and female secondary school teachers on generalized learning disorder in Delta State?

**Table 3.** Descriptive Analysis of the Perception of Male and Female Secondary School Teachers on Generalized Learning Disorder in Delta State.

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
Female	296	69.2708	7.24580	.88522
Male	267	67.6567	9.68828	.98881
Total	563	68.6074	8.77879	.68761

In table 3 above, responses analysed for female and male

secondary school teachers are presented. Female and male have mean value (67.66, 69.27) and standard deviation value (7.25, 9.68). This reveals that there is difference in the perception of male and female secondary school teachers on generalized learning disorder in Delta State. From the result it is seen that male teachers have a better perception of generalized learning disorder than female secondary school teachers in Delta State.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant difference in the perception of generalized learning disorder among male and female secondary school teacher in Delta State.

From table 4, the ANOVA results reveals that the following values  $df = 162$ ,  $f = 1.337$ ,  $sig. = 0.249$  at  $p = 0.05$ . From the result the calculated value is more than the sig. value. As such the null hypothesis which states there is no significant difference in the perception of generalized learning disorder among male and female secondary school teacher in Delta State is hereby rejected. This means that a significant difference exists between female and male secondary school teachers' perception of generalized learning disorder in Delta State.

**Table 4.** One-Way Analysis of Variance of Significant Difference in the Perception of Male and Female Secondary School Teachers on Generalized Learning Disorder in Delta State.

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	102.808	1	102.808	1.337	.249
Within Groups	12382.063	161	76.907		
Total	12484.871	162			

Research Question Three: Is there any therapeutic strategy in managing generalized learning disorder among secondary school students?

**Table 5.** Descriptive Analysis of Suggested Therapy in Managing Generalized Learning Disorder.

SN	Suggested Therapy	Mean	SD	Remark
1	Cognitive Behavioural Therapy	3.62	2.23	Accepted
2	Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy	2.57	1.62	Accepted
3	Family Therapy	3.17	0.53	Accepted
4	Systematic Desensitization	2.50	2.11	Accepted
5	Solution Focused Therapy	3.27	2.67	Accepted

From the above table, various intervention strategies were suggested for managing generalized learning disorder by the nineteen counsellors. From the analysis of the responses, a benchmark of above 2.50 was adopted for acceptance while below 2.50 for rejection. The mean and standard deviation values for the various strategies include: Cognitive

Behaviour Therapy (3.62, 2.23), Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (2.57, 1.62), Family Therapy (3.17, 0.53), Systematic Desensitization (2.50, 2.11) and Solution Focused Therapy (3.27, 2.67) respectively. From the results, cognitive behaviour therapy has the highest mean score for managing generalized learning disorder while systematic desensitization has the lowest mean score. Hence, cognitive behaviour therapy is accepted as the most effective strategy for managing generalized learning disorder.

## 4. Discussion

The results of the study were discussed based on the answered research questions and tested hypothesis. The findings as stated in hypothesis one revealed that there is a significant difference between experienced and less experienced secondary school teachers in their perception of generalized learning disorder in Delta State. In addition,

it found that experienced teachers have better understanding than their less-experienced counterpart. The reason for this finding may be that as years of teaching experience go by, the teachers gets more knowledge concerning learners as well as obtaining knowledge on how to help learners' overcome their challenges. This finding is in support of the findings of Menon [15] who found that the awareness of learning disabilities among school teachers were average and furthermore, that experienced teachers have more understanding and awareness of generalized learning disorder.

The findings as stated in research question two and hypothesis two, revealed that there a significant difference among male and female secondary school teachers in their perception of generalized learning disorder in Delta State. Moreover, the result revealed that male teachers have a better perception of generalized learning disorder in Delta State. The finding of this study is in agreement with the findings of Thomas [14] that male teachers were having better awareness about learning disability than female teachers. But in contrast to the findings of Shetty and Rai [13] who resolved that 1 in 3 teachers had sufficient knowledge about dyslexia while female teachers are more aware of general learning disorders. This study in not in support of the study of Lourdu et al [16] who found that with regard to the gender of the teachers, there is no difference in their level of awareness.

The findings as stated in research question three, reported that Cognitive Behaviour Therapy was selected by the counsellors from the various suggested intervention strategies for managing generalized learning disorder and was accepted as the best of all. However, all other therapeutic strategies (Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy, Family Therapy, Systematic Desensitization and Solution Focused Therapy) are considered relevant. This implies that CBT is not the only strategy for the management of generalized learning disorder, but it is the most effective of all. The findings from this study is in support of the study of Bekirogullari [19] who found the effectiveness of Cognitive Behavioural therapy (CBT) as a contemporary, accepted and effective method of treating people with general learning disabilities, as seen from the evidence to reduce numbers of persons suffering from learning disability illnesses.

## 5. Conclusion

This study has a unique significance for countries and institutions that are ready to experiment different methods of help for children with learning disorders within the regular school system. Learning disability is global problem today and demands a strong great awareness among teachers, counsellors and the general population at large. Without awareness, early identification and necessary intervention approaches might not applied. Hence, exposure and training should be provided to teachers and sensitize the parents so that children with learning disability will get support at home and school and will be successful in their life.

## 6. Recommendations

Based on the above findings, the following recommendations are hereby made:

- 1) Counsellors should embrace cognitive behavioural therapy as effective counselling therapy for students with generalized learning disorder.
- 2) Government should employ counsellors in all secondary schools in Delta State to manage students with generalized learning behaviours.
- 3) A special education expert should be deployed to schools to train teachers on how to manage students with this disorder.
- 4) Counsellors should organize seminars, workshops and special training programmes in every school for teachers to identify and deal with students with learning disabilities.
- 5) Teachers should give special attention to students who have learning disabilities in the classroom.

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