

English Teachers' Perception on Applying MSLT Approach in Accommodating Learning Difficulties of Dyslexic Students to Promote Inclusive Education

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DOI: 10.29322/IJSRP.12.12.2022.p13234

<http://dx.doi.org/10.29322/IJSRP.12.12.2022.p13234>

Paper Received Date: 5th November 2022

Paper Acceptance Date: 5th December 2022

Paper Publication Date: 20th December 2022

Abstract- In accommodating Dyslexic students MSLT approach and Inclusive education go hand in hand. According to statistics, 10% of the world population suffer from Dyslexia and related learning difficulties. Therefore, there might be such students in an English language classroom in Sri Lanka too. Since English language acts as an international language it is significant for the student to learn it. Therefore in this investigation it was focused on English teachers' perception on applying MSLT approach in accommodating learning difficulties of Dyslexic students in order to promote Inclusive education. Thus, the research questions were, to what extent the English teachers in Dehiowita zone are aware of the learning difficulties of Dyslexia and how far they are aware of the relationship between MSLT approach and Dyslexia. In addition, the perception of these teachers regarding 'Inclusive Education' and its relationship to 'MSLT approach' too was investigated. It was a qualitative research and Case study method was implemented to collect data and derive the conclusion. The data were collected from ten teachers via interviews and non-participant observations. In ultimate findings it was evident that 100% teachers were aware of the learning difficulties related to Dyslexia and problems with pronunciation (70%), spelling (100%), memorizing vocabulary (100%), poor reading skills and literacy skills (100%) were prominent. In the group 20% identified the relationship between MSLT and Dyslexia. Moreover, 40% was aware of Inclusive education and 40% was aware of that Dyslexic student and normal students can learn in the same classroom under the concept of Inclusive education. According to observation, only 20% used all the visual, auditory, kinesthetic and tactile sensory systems to enhance the learner and the other 80% used them in different degrees which are 100%, 50%, 30%, 30% respectively. Therefore, it was concluded that there are teachers in Dehiowita zone who learnt about MSLT approach, Inclusive education and Dyslexia separately but lack knowledge in inter relationship among them. Further, it was suggested to provide continuous training sessions, projects and awareness programmes to teachers regarding Dyslexia, MSLT approach and Inclusive education to maintain the sustainable professional development of teachers.

Index Terms- Dyslexia, Inclusive education, Learning disability, MSLT approach, Perception of English teachers

I. INTRODUCTION

With the evolution of science of reading many scholars started to engage in researches which are related to reading development, reasons for reading disability and aspects of reading instructions. These three research areas deal with nature of memory, neurosciences and nature of learning (Moats & Farrell, 2005). Moreover, these three research areas support Multi-sensory Structured Language Teaching Approach (MSLT) which is applied to develop the reading ability of Dyslexic students. Dyslexia is a learning difficulty related to reading disability. In addition it is introduced as a neurobiological learning disorder (Rose, 2009). Dyslexic students mainly showcase drawbacks in vocabulary acquisition, spelling, literacy skills, phonological abilities and reading comprehension (Kormos & Smith, 2012). In accordance with International Dyslexia Association (IDA), MSLT is a successful approach to accommodate Dyslexic students. Further, multisensory learning includes utilizing visual, auditory, kinesthetic and tactile sensory systems to develop the memory and learning procedure (Birsh & Schedler, 2005). Dyslexic students need to learn according to their own pace and the teacher has to handle these students with great patience (Kooij, 2013).

In accordance with the statistics, 10% of the world population suffers from Dyslexia and learning difficulties related to it (Kormos & Smith, 2012). This record indicates that there should be considerable number of students with learning difficulties in a language classroom. Since English language functions as an international language (Jenkins, 2000) and linking language (Neelam, 2013), students have to learn it for their communication with the world, higher studies and world of work. Therefore it is significant for them to learn English language to cope with globalization.

Simultaneously, the concept of Inclusive education is suggested to support Dyslexic students (Kormos & Nijakowska, 2017). The basic principle of Inclusive education is providing equal opportunities to all the children to achieve education (Peterson et al, 2012). The ultimate aim of Inclusive education is creating an effective classroom where both normal and students with learning difficulties would learn together (Sin et al, 2010). Furthermore there are scholars who mentioned that the techniques used to teach Dyslexic

students would bring benefits to normal children too (Reason, 2001). In the past, the students with such learning difficulties were neglected and punished, but in the present the concept of Inclusive education has come into light providing all students with different abilities to learn in the same classroom simultaneously. In accordance with this concept all individuals in a classroom are catered and their differences, disabilities and weaknesses are accepted. Thus all of them should be in the learning system and no one is deprived of education (United Nations' Children's Fund, 2011). On the other hand, it was found that Dyslexic students can be supported if appropriate teaching techniques are applied in classroom. As a result it is suggested that Dyslexic pupils can be taught using Inclusive teaching methods such as MSLT (Kormos & Nijakowska, 2017).

The individual support and awareness of teachers and parents are very significant facts in treating Dyslexic students in inclusive classroom (Kormos & Nijakowska, 2017). In the world there are many schools and organizations which applied quick steps to solve this problem of Dyslexic students (IDA.2009). Nevertheless Dyslexia cannot be overcome quickly and it takes a period of time to be resolved (Sawyer, 2009). In addition the role of teachers and parents are significant as they should be provided with awareness and training regarding how to handle Dyslexic students (Aronin & Floyd, 2013).

This is a study which investigates English teachers' perception on applying MSLT approach in accommodating learning difficulties of Dyslexic students in order to promote Inclusive education in Sri Lanka. In Sri Lanka these students lack proper learning environment (Indrarathne B., 2019). Although the study is focused on Dehiowita educational zone in Sri Lanka, the research study is applicable to the whole country.

II. RESEARCH ELABORATIONS

A. Significance of the study –

The significance of English language as a 'lingua franca' (Jenkins, 2007) has been increasing throughout the world in parallel to globalization. As the first world language it is the mostly used language in international diplomacy, trade, politics and scientific publications. Therefore learning English language is very significant for students in Sri Lanka as it is a key for them to enter higher studies as well as global world. In this process one cannot forget the students with learning difficulties such as Dyslexia, Dysgraphia, Dyscalculia, Dyspraxia and Attention Deficit and Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD). In this research it is expected to investigate whether English teachers have any awareness of MSLT approach, Dyslexia and Inclusive education and the relationship among these three fields. If they are not aware of these aspects regarding English language learning, it is expected to equip them with proper training sessions. If the teachers have prior knowledge about Dyslexia, MSLT and Inclusive education, through the research it is anticipated to investigate the degree of their knowledge regarding these three aspects. Then the responsible people can organize the relevant sessions in accordance with the teachers' prior knowledge.

Especially investigating English teachers' knowledge regarding Dyslexia, MSLT approach, Inclusive education and their inter-relationship is important as the teachers play a vital role in identifying and evaluating in accommodating Dyslexic students. On the other hand, the concept of Inclusive education will be cascaded to teachers, parents, and stake holders and in return students will be benefitted by all of them.

B. The background of the study –

Many researches attempt to identify how the action of reading functions in the brain making it related to functional neuroimaging. It further elaborates how language is processed in the brain (Blachman, Schatschneider, Fletcher, & Clonan, 2003; Eden et al., 2004; Shaywitz, 2003; Simos et al., 2002). Moreover there are many systems in the brain to process the symbols into sounds. Dyslexia is a result created by the disruption of this language processing system and finally it leads to phonological weaknesses. Further it disturbs the decoding process (Shaywitz, 2003). In MSLT approach this neutral disruption is accommodated by the multisensory components utilized by the teacher in the lesson. On the other hand, Dyslexic students prefer to have learning friendly environment in the classroom (Johnson, 2004). Therefore MSLT approach supports the teacher to create such an environment for the students with learning difficulties. Further, researches conducted by National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) states that explicit, structured language teaching is more suitable to overcome the difficulties of Dyslexic students.

According to several researches conducted in Sri Lanka regarding students with learning disabilities, it was found that the teachers have neglected them having negative attitude towards them (Hettiarachchi & Das, 2014). In addition teachers' lack of awareness of both Dyslexia and Inclusive education go hand in hand (Indrarathne, B., 2019). On contrary a research conducted in UK brought out that when the teachers are aware of Dyslexia, they started to showcase somewhat positivity towards Dyslexic children (Taylor & Coyne, 2014). There are some other investigations which uplift the teachers' poor awareness of application of Inclusive education in practical scenarios. (Fayez, Dababneh & Jumiaan, 2011; Hodkinson, 2006 and Mc Cray & Mc Hatton, 2011).

When Sri Lankan context is considered, it is recorded that most of the pupils are with poor performance in their Ordinary Level examination although English acts as a main subject in the curriculum (Perera, 2010). One reason for this poor performance is identified as lack of teacher training courses or poor quality teacher training courses (Wijesinghe, 2014). Further the learners with Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLDs) have been neglected in these teacher training courses. Therefore this fact has become a barrier to reach the concept of Inclusive education.

C. Research Problem –

In accordance with statistics, 10% of the world population suffer from Dyslexia and related learning difficulties (Kormos & Smith, 2012). This is a common issue in English language learning too and there might be many students in a language classroom who suffer from Dyslexia. Therefore there is a possibility of presence of Dyslexic students in a language classroom in Sri Lanka too. Nevertheless most of the English language teachers are not aware of that these Dyslexic students can be accommodated with special teaching methods such as MSLT approach. In addition it is doubtful whether Dyslexic students are identified and supported with proper teaching techniques. In Sri Lanka too Dyslexic students are deprived of proper learning environment (Indrarathne B., 2019).

In the past as well as in the present, students with Dyslexia do not have any favourable environment in a classroom. In fact, the tradition was to punish these children due to teachers' lack of knowledge in accommodating Dyslexic students. Even among peer groups these students were humiliated and despised. The teachers labeled them as 'misfits' to gain education and were neglected.

In later period, it was found that there are students in a classroom with learning difficulties such as Dyslexia. It does not convey the idea that these students are not in a position to learn, but they need special attention and their own pace of learning. They mainly showcase drawbacks in reading comprehension and get embarrassed in loud reading. They are reluctant to have very rude and strict teachers. Their capabilities and abilities are hindered when they are treated rudely. On the other hand there is no quick treatment for Dyslexic students and it takes a long period to accommodate them with teacher's great patience. Therefore, if these Dyslexic students are applied with MSLT approach, they will be supported a lot in their learning procedure.

In Sri Lankan context both teachers and parents are not aware of Dyslexia much. Although there were some teacher training programmes, these were not adequate to update the teachers. In the past it was difficult for Dyslexic students to learn in the normal classroom and in the present too there is no any difference in that situation. Nevertheless the concept of Inclusive education creates a platform for both normal and Dyslexic students to learn in the same classroom simultaneously.

According to the experience of the researcher, in Sri Lanka there are no adequate awareness programmes regarding Dyslexia and Inclusive education. Due to these reasons, most of the English teachers have negative attitudes towards children with learning difficulties. Another issue related to this is lack of training platforms opened to teachers regarding Dyslexia and MSLT (Chitsa & Mpofo, 2016).

D. Research Questions –

The research questions of this investigation are,

- 1) To what extent are the English teachers in Dehiowita zone aware of the learning difficulties of Dyslexia?
- 2) How far are the English teachers of Dehiowita zone aware of the relationship between MSLT approach and Dyslexia?
- 3) What is the perception of English teachers in Dehiowita zone regarding the concept, 'Inclusive Education' and its relationship to MSLT approach'?

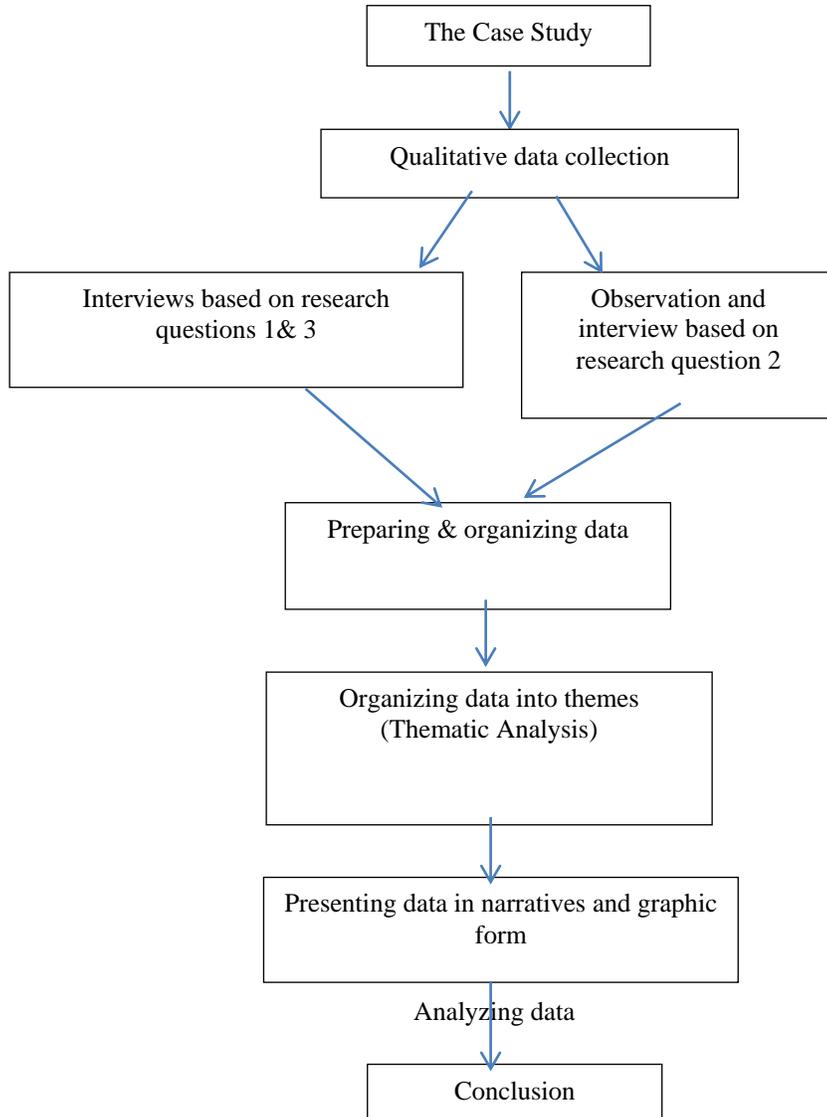
E. Methodology –

This research is an exploration done on English teachers' perception on applying MSLT approach in accommodating learning difficulties of Dyslexic students to promote Inclusive education. In this study, the qualitative research approach was selected and Case study method was applied. In accordance with Cresswell, "Case study research is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information and reports a case description and case based themes" (Cresswell, 2007).

The data in need of carrying out the Case study were collected by interviews and non-participant observations. Accordingly, ten English teachers in Dehiowita educational zone were interviewed and their reading lessons were observed and assessed with the help of a check list. The interview questions and the competencies in the check lists were based on research questions. Collected data were presented in tables, bar graphs and pie charts.

The research framework is displayed by the Diagram 1 which includes all the steps; selection of method, data collection, analysis and conclusion.

Diagram 1: The Research Design



The interviews were conducted in order to make findings based on research questions 1, 2 and 3 while observation checklist was based on research question 2. Some interviews were conducted face to face mode while others were conducted via phone and Zoom modes. Related to the interviews, the following questions were asked by the teachers. Each teacher was interviewed for 15 minutes.

Questions related to Research Question 1 -

- a) Are there students with learning difficulties related to reading in your classes?
If so, what are these difficulties?
- b) How do you react to these learning difficulties of the students?
- c) Have you made their parents aware of these learning difficulties? What was their response?
- d) Have you heard about learning difficulty called Dyslexia? Then, what is it?
- e) Were you given a training regarding how to accommodate with Dyslexic children?
If so, from where did you get the training?

Question related to Research Question 2 –

f) What is the relationship between MSLT approach and Dyslexia?

Questions related to Research Question 3 –

g) What do you understand by Inclusive education?

h) Can the Dyslexic children learn in the normal classroom under the concept of Inclusive education? Is it successful? What are the challenges the teacher might face?

i) What is the relationship between MSLT approach and the concept of Inclusive education?

The observation is based on research question 2 –

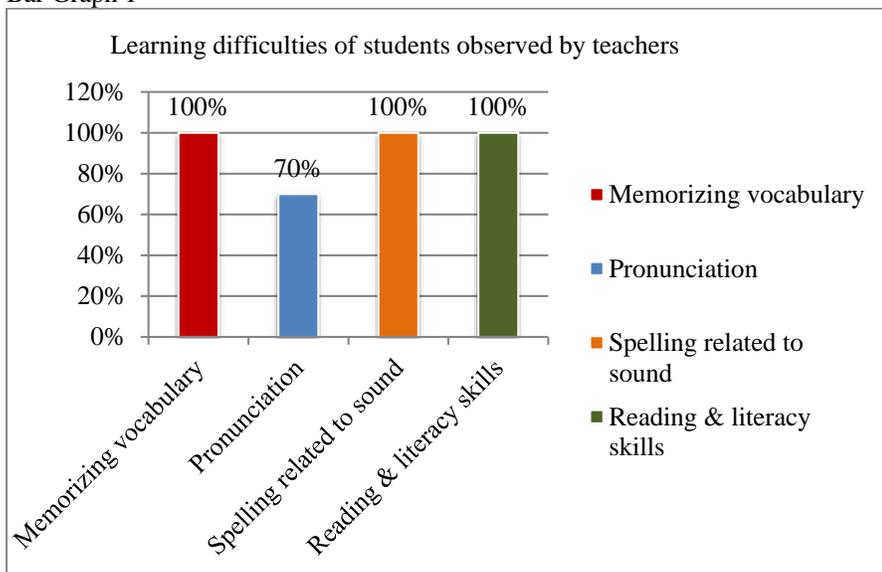
It was observed whether the teachers used visual, auditory, kinesthetic and tactile sensory systems simultaneously to enhance the memory and learning of the children. Accordingly ten English teachers who teach English for secondary classes were observed. Moreover it was a non-random or purposive sample.

III. DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

A. Data Presentation and Analysis –

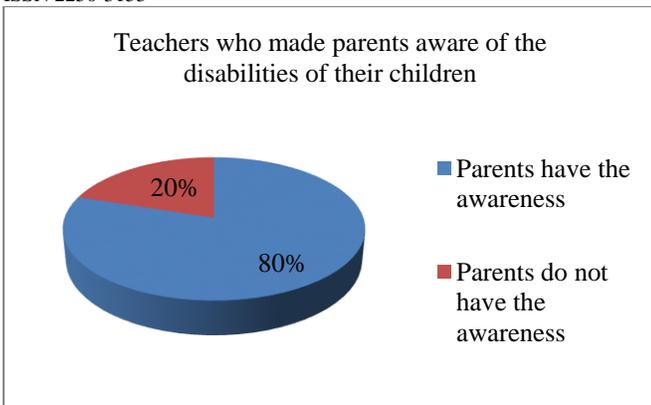
The responses given by the teachers are presented in tables, pie charts and bar graphs below.

Bar Graph 1 -



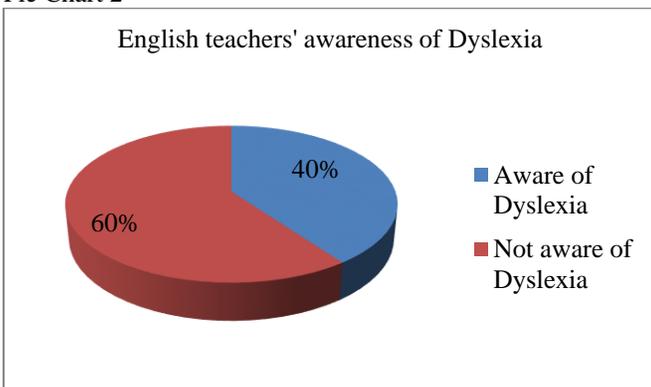
The Bar graph 1 presents the learning difficulties of students observed by teachers. There are four types of learning difficulties which are drawbacks in memorizing vocabulary (100%), difficulty in proper pronunciation (70%), inability to identify spelling related to sound (100%) and weaknesses in reading and literacy skills (100%).

Pie Chart 1 -



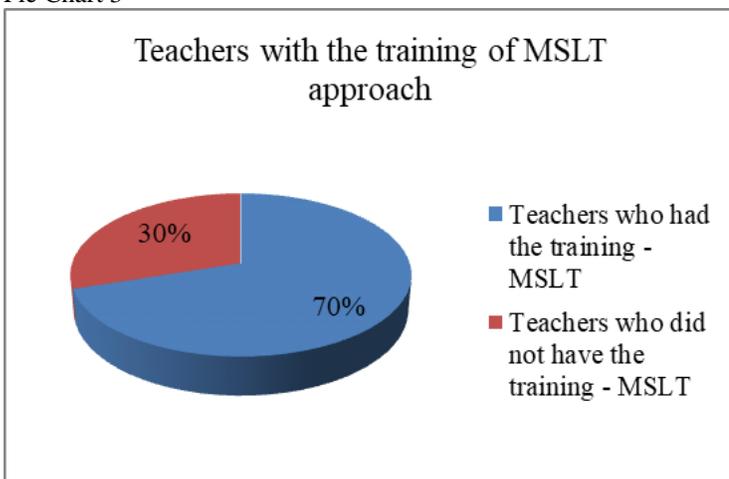
The Pie chart 1 displays the percentages of teachers who made parents aware of the disabilities of their children. In the group 80% of teachers made parents aware of the disabilities of their children while 20% did not make parents aware of it.

Pie Chart 2 -



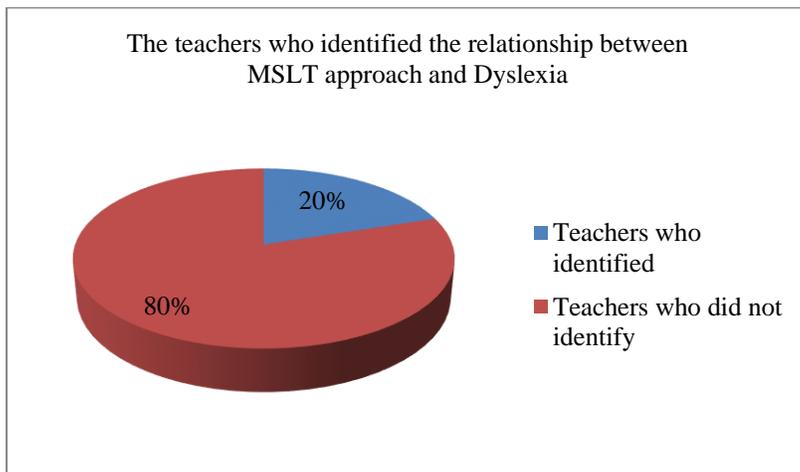
The Pie chart 2 shows the English teachers' awareness of Dyslexia. With reference to Pie chart 2, 40% in the group of teachers are aware of Dyslexia and 60% of the group are not aware of Dyslexia.

Pie Chart 3 -



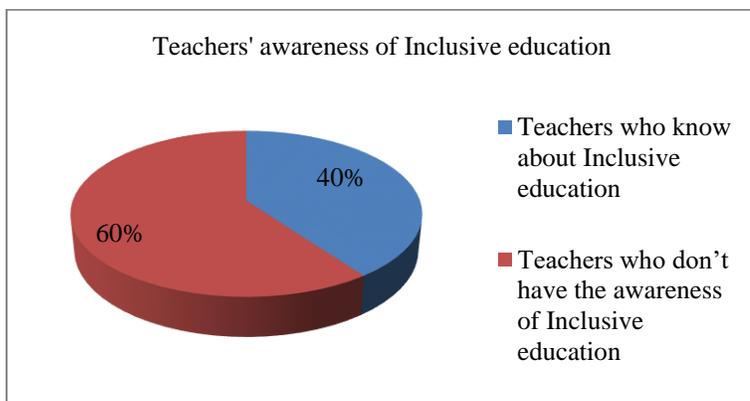
The Pie chart 3 illustrates the percentages of the teachers who had the training of MSLT approach (70%) and who did not have the training of MSLT approach (30%) respectively.

Pie Chart 4 –



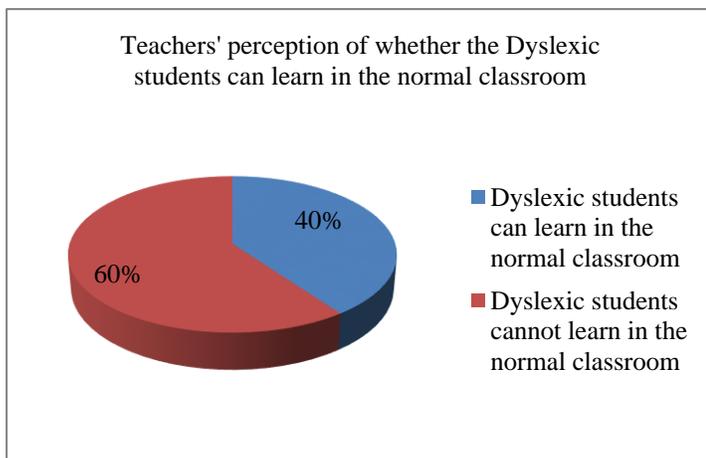
The Pie chart 4 presents the percentages of the teachers who identified the relationship between MSLT approach and Dyslexia. Accordingly, 20% of the group of teachers identified the relationship between MSLT approach and Dyslexia whereas 80% failed to identify it.

Pie Chart 5 –



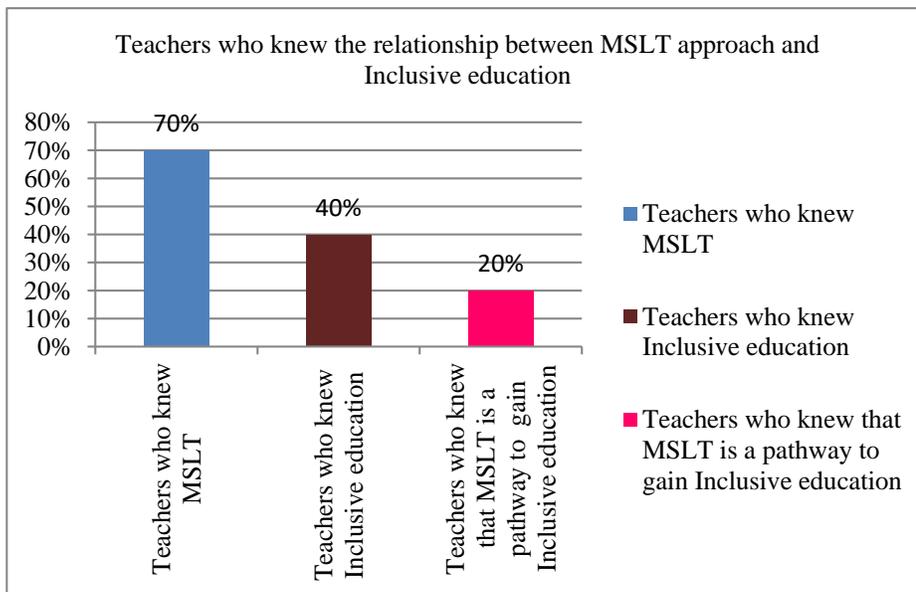
The Pie chart 5 indicates teachers' awareness of Inclusive education. With reference to Pie chart 5, 40% in the group was aware of Inclusive education while 60% was not aware of it.

Pie Chart 6 –



The Pie chart 6 displays teachers' perception of whether the Dyslexic students can learn in the normal classroom or not. In the group of teachers 40% stated the positive response while 60% declared the negative response.

Bar graph 2 -



The Bar graph 2 indicates the percentages of teachers in the group who knew the relationship between MSLT approach and Inclusive education. The Bar graph shows that there are 70% and 40% in the group who knew about MSLT approach and Inclusive education respectively whereas only 20% was aware of the relationship between these two.

The observation based on research question 2 –

The observation sheets were prepared in order to examine whether the 10 teachers use the visual, auditory, kinesthetic and tactile sensory systems (VAKT) simultaneously to teach the students.

Table 1 –
 Teachers’ use of MSLT approach to teach students

Teacher	Visual	Auditory	Kinesthetic	Tactile	Total
Tr. 1	✓	✓	-	-	02
Tr. 2	✓	✓	✓	✓	04
Tr. 3	✓	-	-	✓	02
Tr. 4	✓	✓	✓	-	03
Tr. 5	✓	-	-	-	01
Tr. 6	✓	✓	✓	✓	04
Tr. 7	✓	-	-	-	01
Tr. 8	✓	✓	-	-	02
Tr. 9	✓	-	-	-	01
Tr. 10	✓	-	-	-	01
Most popular pathway	10 100%	05 50%	03 30%	03 30%	

The Table 1 presents the teachers’ use of MSLT approach in teaching students. Accordingly teachers’ use of visual, auditory, kinesthetic and tactile sensory systems in enhancing the memory and the learning of students was marked.

B. Discussion and Findings –

a) In accordance with research question 1, all the teachers in the research sample (100%) reported that there are students in their classes with learning difficulties related to reading. All the teachers (100%) told that these students are with great difficulty in memorizing the vocabulary and the meanings related to them. Moreover, 70% mentioned that these students are poor in pronunciation and they cannot relate the symbol with the sound. In addition these teachers reported that pronunciation problem is more common in boys than girls. All the teachers (100%) stated that there are children who cannot write spelling related to the sounds. Moreover all the teachers (100%) mentioned that all these drawbacks are related to students’ reading skill and literacy skills. These findings can be related to what Kormos and Smith investigated regarding children with SpLDs which is 10% of the world population suffer from Dyslexia and related learning difficulties (Kormos & Smith, 2012). Therefore there is a possibility of having such children in an English classroom too.

b) All the teachers (100%) said that they had to pay special attention to the pupils with learning difficulties. In group work they were put into mix ability groups to get the support of the others. Furthermore 20% mentioned that they give some extra activities to them which cope up with their standards and do MSLT projects with them. As mentioned in the “Background of the study”, the neutral disruption occurs in the brain of Dyslexic students is accommodated by multisensory components used by the teacher. But all the teachers (100%) stated that it was difficult to teach them in a normal classroom as they need a slow pace to learn. Further the teachers

said that they were unsuccessful in teaching these students because they have to consider the normal children as well as covering the syllabus. According to them, too much time spending with students with learning difficulties makes other normal students bored with the lesson. The teachers experience these challenges due to poor awareness of application of Inclusive education and MSLT approach in the classroom.

c) According to teachers' remarks 80% of them made parents aware of the learning difficulties of their children where as 20% stated that parents are not in a position to understand these problems as they are from uneducated rural background. Those who made parents aware of the problem reported that these parents prefer if their children would learn in the same normal classroom thinking that they will be labeled as disable children if they are grouped into a separate classroom. According to Jenkins, Dyslexic students need the support and awareness of both teachers and parents in their treatment (Jenkins, 2000). As Aronin and Floyd (2013) mention, parents and teachers should be provided with awareness and training regarding handling of Dyslexic students.

d) Only 40% of the sample has heard about Dyslexia. They knew that it is a name given for learning disability but they were neither able to define it nor explain it properly. They reported that they have forgotten about Dyslexia although they have learned about it. Therefore it was evident that 60% of the group was not aware of what Dyslexia is. These results can be related with the findings made by Indrarathne B. (2019) in Sri Lanka and it was found that English teachers were not aware of both Dyslexia and Inclusive education much. But by the end of 2022, 40% of the selected group became aware of Dyslexia.

e) With regard to the training given for the teachers about how to accommodate Dyslexic students, 70% teachers mentioned that they were provided training on MSLT approach nevertheless they were not much aware of that Dyslexic students can be accommodated by this approach. These teachers told that they were trained by Regional English Support Centre (RESC), Kegalle regarding MSLT approach. The training was implemented as physical interactive sessions as well as online sessions. There are 30% teachers in the selected group who did not receive the training. In the 'Background of the Study' it was mentioned that lack of teacher training courses or poor quality teacher training courses are the reasons for students' low performance (Wijesinghe, 2014) and the learners with Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLDs) have been neglected in these teacher training courses. Nevertheless 70% of the group became aware of MSLT approach because of the training courses provided for them.

f) Out of 10 teachers only 2 (20%) were able to identify the relationship between MSLT approach and Dyslexia. They said that MSLT approach is a successful teaching method that a teacher can use to teach both normal and Dyslexic students who are in the same classroom. The other 80% of the sample did not have any idea about the relationship between MSLT approach and Dyslexia. It is evident that teachers knew about Dyslexia and MSLT approach separately but they were not aware of the relationship between these two.

g) With reference to research question 3, 40% of teachers were aware of Inclusive education and the other 60% did not have any idea about it. Those who knew about it have gained the knowledge through the sessions conducted by NIE (National Institute of Education), Sri Lanka. Moreover, those who have heard the word had a rough idea about it. Teachers' lack of awareness of Inclusive education can be related to accommodating Dyslexic children (Indrarathne, B., 2019). Therefore those who are unaware of Inclusive education might neglect Dyslexic children in their teaching process.

h) In the research sample 40% mentioned that Dyslexic students can learn in a normal classroom under the concept of Inclusive education whereas 60% was doubtful whether it would be successful. They further explained that it would be challengeable to cope up with Dyslexic students in the same classroom while paying special attention to them as they are very slow in tackling the language. On the other hand, another challenge that the teacher faces is making lots of preparations for the lesson. The former 40% stated that it would be possible to handle both normal and Dyslexic children in the same classroom if they utilize the proper teaching method. In the 'Background of the study' it was stated that there are many systems in the brain to process the symbols into sounds and Dyslexia is resulted by the disruption of this language processing system. Further it results phonological weaknesses and disturbs the decoding process (Shaywitz, 2003). It is evident that the 40% of the group were able to handle children with learning difficulties as they utilized MSLT approach to accommodate these children.

i) In the group 70% knew what MSLT approach is and 40% was aware of what Inclusive Education is. Nevertheless, only 20% were aware of that the key to reach Inclusive education is MSLT approach. They declared that they knew no about the relationship between MSLT approach and Inclusive education. MSLT approach includes visual, auditory, kinesthetic and tactile pathways to enhance the memory and learning procedure of a child (Birsh & Schedler, 2005). Therefore it should be an appropriate teaching method which assists children with SpLDs.

In accordance with the table 1, it is transparent that only two teachers (20%) have used all the visual, auditory, kinesthetic and tactile sensory systems to enhance students learning process. Only one teacher (10%) has applied visual, auditory and kinesthetic sensory systems while three teachers (30%) have used only two sensory systems. Moreover three teachers (30%) have used only one sensory system which is the visual one. When the Table 1 is observed it is evident that visual sensory system is popular among teachers as all of them have utilized it. The next popular one is auditory sensory system as 5 teachers (50%) used it. The kinesthetic and tactile sensory systems are less popular than Visual and Auditory sensory systems as these two were utilized by only three (30%) teachers.

IV. CONCLUSION

With reference to the research question 1, all the teachers (100%) were aware of learning difficulties of their students related to reading. The identified learning difficulties were problems in pronunciation (70%), inability to memorize the vocabulary (100%), spelling problems (100%), poor reading skills and literacy skills (100%).

In accordance with research question 2, only 20% of the group identified the relationship between MSLT approach and Dyslexia. Therefore it is evident that 80% represents who are not aware of this relationship.

With reference to research question 3, 40% of the selected group was aware of Inclusive education while 60% were not. Consequently, only 40% of the group was aware of that Dyslexic students can learn in a normal classroom under the concept of Inclusive education. The findings of the teacher observation brought out that only 20% of the group has used visual, auditory, kinesthetic and tactile pathways to enhance students' memory and learning. Moreover, the most popular mode utilized by teachers was visual pathway.

As a whole, it is very transparent that Dyslexia, MSLT approach and Inclusive education are inter related with each other. With reference to the findings of the research, it is obvious that the teachers in Dehiowita educational zone have learnt them separately but they were not much aware of the relationship among them.

In addition, it is suggested to provide continuous training programmes to teachers regarding Dyslexia, MSLT approach and Inclusive education emphasizing the relationship among these three areas in accommodating students with learning difficulties. Further the teachers who are empowered with the knowledge of Dyslexia, MSLT approach and Inclusive education can launch language projects in order to assist students with SpLDs.

According to the researcher's experience these findings, facts and suggestions are common to Dehiowita educational zone and further researches can be done on the same topic.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Senevirathne Bandara, The Professor in Education, Rajarata University, Sri Lanka
Bimali Indrathne, The Assistant Professor in Applied Linguistics, University of York, UK

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