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EFFECTIVE EDUCATION FOR DIFFERENTLY ABLED CHILDREN IN REGULAR STREAM: PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHERS

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ABSTRACT

Inclusive education is concerned with reducing all exclusionary pressures arise on the basis of disability, gender, class, family structure and life style. The emerging trend is to open the doors for the disabled children to get education on par with the non-disabled. Though there are children who can be helped in special schools or in integrated education programmes whichever is feasible, certainly Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) is one of the best solutions for a country like ours. The present study was conducted in Lalgudi block of Tiruchirappalli District, Tamilnadu. The universe consists of 278 primary school teachers in Lalgudi block, Tiruchirappalli District. There are 8 Government & 7 Aided schools, out of which the researchers selected 10 primary school teachers from each schools (n=150) through stratified disproportionate random sampling technique. The study reveal that in all the aspects the normal school teachers demonstrated only moderate level of attitude and competency irrespective of their awareness. The present study highlights that social workers can play a vital role in educational setting are to provide all kinds of resource support for inclusive education. This support comes in the form of early intervention, assessment and therapeutic services, parental education and community development. They are responsible for identification and enrolment of the special children either in regular school or any other suitable educational centre.

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KEYWORDS
 Inclusive education, Competency, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and Education for all.

INTRODUCTION

The belief that education, if available to any, should be available equally to all was also energized by the emergent awareness of individual differences among students and the need, indeed the responsibility of the school, to adapt curricula to these differences. Children with special needs received individualized education programs with goals, expected learning processes, and educational resources tailored to their needs. The movement to individualize education for all children in the context of standards of achievement continues to be one of the central issues in education. Philosophies of inclusion and respect for individual differences continue to shape profoundly the practice of education and provide the basis for the role of the school social worker. The correspondence between social work values, the emergent mission of education, and the role of the school social worker is illustrated by Allen-Meaers (1999). The mission of education, implicit in these values, became the basis for school social work as it emerged in the twentieth century.

Social Work Values	Application to Social Work in Schools
Recognition of the worth and dignity of each human being	Each pupil is valued as an individual regardless of any unique characteristic
The right to self-determination or self –realization	Each pupil should be allowed to share in the learning process
Respect for individual potential and support for an individual’s aspirations to attain it	Individual differences (including differences in rate of learning) should be recognized, intervention should be aims at supporting pupil’s education goals.
The right of each individual to be different from every other and to be accorded respect for those differences	Each child, regardless of race and socio economic characteristics, has a right to equal treatment in the school.

Dynamic and wide ranging and involves children, their families, and an institution called school. It is the context for school social work. School is no longer viewed as a building or a collection of classrooms in which teachers and pupils work together. The school community, no longer simply bounded by geography, comprises all those who engage in the educational process. As in any community, there are varied concrete roles. People fit into these communities in very different ways. Parents and families have membership through their children. Teachers and other school personnel are members with accountability to parents, children, and the broader community. Drawing on each person’s capacities, the school social worker focuses on making the educational process work to the fullest extent. Therefore, school social workers work with parents, teachers, pupils, and administrators on behalf of vulnerable children or groups of children. The success of the process depends on the collective and individual involvement of everyone. The social worker helps the school community operate as a real community so that personal, familial, and community resources can be discovered and used to meet children’s developmental needs (Barber, 1960). The inclusive education can act as a catalyst for change in educational practice, leading to improved quality of education. Including children with special needs in mainstream schools challenges teachers to develop more child-centered, participatory, and active teaching approaches – and this benefits all children. However, it promotes activities which help disabled children to develop their full potential, become self-reliant and participate in their own communities. At the same time, it challenges discriminatory attitudes in the community, helping parents to think positively about their disabled children and promoting wider social inclusion (Puri, 2008).

The concept of inclusion as an ideology should be assimilated right from the classroom level, and in this context general teachers and social workers are the key players in inclusive education. Social Workers can play a most important role in educational setting is to provide all kinds of resource support for inclusive education. This support comes in the form of early intervention, assessment and therapeutic services, parental education and community development. They are responsible for identification and enrolment of the special children either in regular school or any other suitable educational centre. The selected qualified special teachers and social workers appoint them at block level. If the special teachers are trained in dealing with a particular category of disability, the social workers can provide cross-disability training to resource teachers so that all the categories of children are provided the needed support (Dakar, 2000).

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To assess the awareness, attitude and competencies of normal school teachers on different aspects of children with disabilities.
2. To find out the significant difference, if any, in the awareness, attitude and competencies of normal school teachers on different aspects of children with disabilities due to variation in their gender, age, educational qualification, training in special education, years of experience, location of school, nature of school, category of school and type of school they are working.
3. To find out the relationship between teachers’ awareness & attitude, awareness & existing competencies and attitude & existing competencies to deal children with disabilities.

4. To study how far and to what extent the independent variables of the normal school teachers (gender, age, educational qualification, training in special education, years of experience, location of school, nature of school, category of school and type of school) influence the dependent variables (awareness, attitude and existing competencies) of teachers.

METHODS AND TOOLS

The present study was conducted in Lalgudi block of Tiruchirappalli district. The universe consists of 278 primary school teachers in Lalgudi block, Tiruchirappalli District. There are 8 Government & 7 Aided schools, out of which the researchers selected 10 primary school teachers from each schools (n=150) through stratified disproportionate random sampling technique. The present study was descriptive in nature. In order to respond to the research questions, the following analyses of the data were undertaken. First, the information from the closed-ended items in the questionnaire was entered into the SPSS statistical package. In addition an interpretational approach was applied to identify categories and subcategories in the answers and comments given to the open-ended items in the questionnaire, thus enabling to entry of this information into SPSS as well. Second, an exploratory analysis approach was applied to all data, providing frequency distributions as well as graphical displays of data. Descriptive statistical analyses indicated some not statistically significant (chi-square), interdependency between teacher or school factors and teachers opinions about inclusion. Finally, the information extracted was analyzed on the basis of the assumption that teachers' beliefs about and acceptance of inclusive education are significant predictors of the degree to which they carry out inclusive practices. Three main themes were generated and discussed: opinions about inclusion and factors associated with teachers' opinions, preferred models inclusion and present classroom practices. The collected data were analyzed by using appropriate statistical techniques such as mean, SD, mean \pm 1SD, t / F- test, correlations and stepwise multiple regression. The obtained data are presented in the form of tables and discussed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

TABLE 1: ASCENDING MEAN SCORES PER SCALE ITEMS ON ATIE

Rank of items	Test Items	N	percent	Mean	SD
1	Integrated education is a practical solution to the behaviour problem of disabled children.	150	58	1.1100	.3134
2	Disabled children should be provided with necessary apparatus like wheelchairs, artificial limb etc., which will help them for movement and communication with the people in the community.	150	56.3	1.1267	.3332
3	Modified furniture to provide comfort to the children with disability is very much essential in a regular classroom.	150	59	1.1800	.3848
4	Children with disability have specific difficulties of learning; therefore some special training materials should be used in regular classroom situation.	150	58.7	1.1933	.3956
5	Children with disability are able to lead a free and independent life.	150	63	1.2067	.4056
6	They can learn as efficiently as the normal children.	150	59.7	1.2100	.4080
7	Physical therapists should take much care to enable the disabled child to develop the ability for free movement.	150	79	1.2333	.4237
8	Healthy relationship between the two groups of children in an inclusive system only.	150	76.3	1.2433	.4298
9	Children with disability are getting the equal opportunity like the normal children in the classroom.	150	79.7	1.2667	.4430
10	Children with special needs are no way inferior to the normal children in intellectual pursuits.	150	79.3	1.2867	.4530
11	Children with disability are getting the same type of social acceptance with the normal children.	150	80.7	1.3133	.446
12	Special needs children do not have any impairment of intellectual functioning, they do not need any specialized teaching methods, and they can be placed in a general classroom.	150	82	1.3367	.4734
13	IED provides the least restrictive and the most effective environment to disabled children so than they may grow and develop like other children.	150	84	1.3400	.4745
14	Integrated education is a viable approach to attain the goals of universalization of elementary education by providing equality of educational and developmental opportunities to the children with disabilities.	150	89.7	1.3700	.4836
15	Children with disability are less well accepted than normal children in an integrated class, as a result of which these children face many psychological problems.	150	85.7	1.3933	.4893
16	Curriculum revision is not essential for children with special needs.	150	89.6	1.4367	.4968
17	Inclusive Education can improve the academic performance of the children with disabilities.	150	90.0	1.8233	.3820

Table 1 indicates the Teacher's perception towards inclusive education all the items are arranged in an ascending order based on its mean score. It implies that lower the mean score lower level of attitude towards the ATIE and higher the score higher level of attitude towards ATIE. Item1 shows that more than half (58 percent) of respondents agreed that integrated education is a practical solution to the behaviour problem of disabled children (mean score 1.11, SD .31). In this regard, previous studies support the views that inclusive education is provide opportunities for social interactions often occur in contexts (such as those related to play) that provide desirable stimulation and thus act as setting events for fewer inappropriate and more pro-social behaviors. Through modeling, students with developmental disabilities appear to learn behaviors that are essential to successful integration in school and community. For item 2, 3, & 7, majority of the respondents agreed that Disabled children should be provided with necessary apparatus like wheelchairs, artificial limb etc., which will help them for movement and communication with the people in the community (Mean score 1.12, SD .33, 56.3 percent); modified furniture to provide comfort to the children with disability is very much essential in a regular classroom (Mean score 1.18, SD .38, 59 percent) and Physical therapists should take much care to enable the disabled child to develop the ability for free movement (Mean score 1.2 SD .42, 79 percent).

Nevertheless, item 3, 4, 5 & 13 about majority (60 percent) of the respondents have favourable attitude towards Children with disability have specific difficulties of learning; therefore some special training materials should be used in regular classroom situation so that they may able to lead a free and independent life (Mean score 1.19 SD .39, 58.7 percent); Special needs children do not have any impairment of intellectual functioning, they do not need any specialized teaching methods, and they can be placed in a general classroom (Mean score 1.33 SD .47, 82 percent) and IED provides the least restrictive and the most effective environment to disabled children so than they may grow and develop like other children (Mean score 1.34 SD .47, 84 percent). Item 8, 9, 10 & 15 about majority of the respondents perceived the mixed feelings of relationship between children with disability and normal children, Healthy relationship between the two groups of children in an inclusive system only (Mean score 1.24, SD .42, 76.3 percent); Children with disability are getting the equal opportunity like the normal children in the classroom (Mean score 1.26, SD .44, 79.7 percent) and Children with disability are getting the same type of social acceptance with the normal children (Mean score 1.31, SD .446, 80.7 percent). With regard to 14 & 17 item about two – third of the respondents agreed that Integrated Education is a viable approach to attain the goals of Universalization of Elementary Education (UPE) by providing equality of educational and developmental opportunities to the children with disabilities (Mean score 1.37, SD .48, 89.7 percent) and Inclusive Education can improve the academic performance of the children with disabilities (Mean score 1.82, SD .38, 90 percent). Similar findings were found in previous studies to identify the attitude of teachers towards inclusion. The survey focused on areas such as the role of regular teachers, their attitudes and knowledge about inclusion, collaboration and team teaching, recourse, the rights of learners, and family support. It emphasized the attitudes of teachers with little experience of inclusive education towards the placement of learners with special needs in regular classrooms, may not be different from those of established practitioners. The majority is respondents agreed that the education of learners with special needs is not the primary responsibility of the regular education teacher (Brent et al., 2003 & Gudio, 1990)

TABLE 2: ASCENDING MEAN SCORES PER SCALE ITEMS ON TCTCWD

Rank of items	Test Items	N	percent	Mean	SD
1	Pupils with emotional and behavioural problems should be included in the mainstream classes.	150	42.9	1.1100	.3134
2	Difficult to give equal attention to all students in inclusive classrooms.	150	47.8	1.1167	.3216
3	Children with disabilities in your classroom.	150	50.7	1.2167	.4127
4	Able to cope with disabled students.	150	60.5	1.2333	.4237
5	Mainstream classroom teachers should have the training and skills to teach special needs students.	150	68.7	1.2533	.4356
6	Need to be a special kind of teacher to teach pupils with special educational needs.	150	68.1	1.2533	.4356
7	Are able to manage the behavior of children with disabilities.	150	64.7	1.2633	.4412
8	Have the skills required teaching special educational needs in an inclusive setting.	150	70.8	1.3200	.4673
9	Adequate instructional materials are available with you for teaching children with disabilities.	150	71.5	1.3333	.4722
10	Willing to attend additional workshops to broaden your knowledge about education of children with disabilities.	150	87.7	1.4200	.4944
11	Some people claim to have special educational needs to get extra attention and special treatment.	150	90.4	1.6167	.4870
12	Able to remediate the learning benefits of children with disabilities.	150	98.4	1.6733	.4698

Table 2 explain that teachers' level of awareness and competency towards children with disabilities, 42.9 percent of the respondents agreed that Pupils with emotional and behavioural problems should be included in the mainstream classes (Mean score, 1.11 SD .31). Nevertheless, nearly half (47.7 percent) of the respondents agreed that equal attention should be given to all students in inclusive classrooms without any ground of caste, class, colour and disability (Mean score, 1.11 SD .32). Most importantly, more than half of respondents agreed that all are having children with disabilities in their classroom (Mean score 1.21, SD .41, 50.7 percent); they are able to cope with disabled students (Mean score 1.23, SD .42, 60.5 percent) and Mainstream classroom teachers should have the training and skills to teach special needs students (Mean score 1.25, SD .43, 68.7 percent). With regard to special educators, two – third of the respondents agreed that need to be a special kind of teacher to teach pupils with special educational needs (Mean score, 1.25, SD.43, 68.1 percent), availability of adequate instructional materials for teaching children with disabilities (Mean score 1.33, SD.47, 71.5 percent) and willing to attend additional workshops to broaden their knowledge about education of children with disabilities (Mean score 1.42, SD .49, 87.7 percent). The next probing questions reveal that Inclusive Education is a suitable model for children with special needs to remediate the learning benefits.

In this regard previous studies support the view that to conclude a holistic view on competencies of teachers to handle children with disabilities was seen through the quoted studies. Studies that are conducted directly on competencies of teachers have listed out the important competencies required for teachers have listed out the important competencies required for a teacher (Reddy, 2004). Some researchers carried out their studies to find out the effectiveness of certain instructional strategies in dealing children with disabilities which a competent teacher should use in their teaching-learning process. Instructional strategies used in the above quoted studies are of much use in educating the children with disabilities. A teacher should possess the abilities or competency to adopt those instructional strategies effectively to deal children with disabilities. Another one study clearly indicated the special education teacher's low performance in guidance and counseling activities and poor infrastructure facility available in general schools (Treder et al., 2000).

To interpretart these findings it should be noted that an efficient teacher with specific competencies can handle children with disabilities more effectively. Every special and normal school teacher needs certain specific competencies to know the nature and type of disabilities in children. The teacher should be prepared to recognize the problem or a condition and cause for it. Identification and assessment ability is a must for a teacher as they are with the children and considered as a second parent. Proficient in teaching Strategies and methods is an important task of a teacher. Use of innovative teaching strategies to compensate the disabilities in children is one of the competencies a teacher should possess (Ali, 2006).

Table 3 inferred that there is a significant different between gender, Training in special education needs and nature of school of the respondents with regard to overall level of attitude towards Inclusive Education for Disabled (IED) at 1 percent level of significant. The mean score indicates that female teachers (154.97); Special training programme attended (158.14) and Government Aided Private schools (174.55) were having high level of attitude towards IED. However, that there is significant variance among Age, Educational qualification and Teaching experience of the respondents with regard to overall level of attitude towards IED. The mean score indicates that age belongs to 51 years and above (161.11), who had post graduate with B.Ed., and M.Ed., (162.25) and who have teaching experience of 21 years and above (158.75) were having high level of attitude toward IED. Some noteworthy results were emerged from this observation perceived by primary schools teachers who have higher the age, more teaching experience, higher education qualification and who had special training their level of attitude towards IED is higher.

Further there is a significant different between gender, Training in special education needs and nature of school of the respondents with regard to overall level of Competency towards Children With Special Needs (CWSN) at 1 percent level of significant. The mean score indicates that female teachers (92.41); Special training programme attended (96.34) and Government Aided Private schools (113.07) were having high level of attitude towards CWSN. However, that there is significant variance among Age, Educational qualification and Teaching experience of the respondents with regard to overall level of attitude towards CWSN. The mean score indicates that age belongs to 51 years and above (93.11), who had post graduate with B.Ed., and M.Ed., (94.75) and who have teaching experience of 21 years and above (95.91) were having high level of attitude toward CWSN. Some noteworthy results were emerged from this observation perceived by primary schools teachers who have higher the age, more teaching experience, higher education qualification and who had special training their level of attitude towards CWSN is higher.

Other factors that have been studied with regard to how they affect teachers' attitudes toward integration include gender, teachers' experiences, level of education and training. With regard to gender, male teachers' attitudes toward integration are more negative than female teachers. Studies that examined teachers' experiences noted that teachers' acceptance of integration is related to previous experience with children with disabilities. The years of teaching experience was positively correlated with attitudes toward integration. This finding supports the regression analysis conducted in this study, which showed that the actual teaching experiences of teachers were more important in predicting attitudes towards IED than the teachers' owns ideas and beliefs. Although years of teaching experience was associated with attitudes, having a higher educational degree was positively correlated with attitudes toward integration. This finding underscores the importance of education in implementing changes, and in this particular case, in acceptance and willingness to accommodate students with disabilities (Heller et al., 1999 & Hannah, 1998).

CORRELATIONAL STUDIES

Correlation studies are made to find out the relationship between awareness & attitude, awareness & existing competencies and attitude & existing competencies of normal school teachers to deal children with disabilities. For this, Karl Pearson Correlation Co-efficient is used.

TABLE 4: CORRELATION STUDIES

	Awareness & Attitude	Awareness & Existing Competencies	Attitude & Existing Competencies
Concept of disabilities	0.043 [®]	0.215**	0.036 [®]
Causes & identification	0.237**	0.482**	0.238**
Identification & Assessment	0.124**	0.182**	0.306**
Teaching & Guidance	0.421**	0.640**	0.394**
Guidance & Counselling	0.412**	0.595**	0.416**
Dimensions as a whole	0.522**	0.754**	0.492**

Note:

[®] Not Significant at 0.05 level

** Significant at 0.01 level

The correlation studies in table 4 also reveals that there is a significant positive correlation between awareness & attitude, attitude & existing competencies with reference to all the dimensions of disabilities except for concept of disabilities (0.043 and 0.036). Likewise, there is a significant positive correlation between awareness and existing competencies with reference to all the dimensions of disabilities in children. This result clearly indicate that higher the awareness better will be the attitude and competencies, better the attitude more will be the competency of teachers in dealing children with special needs. Hence it is imperative to sensitize the teachers towards different aspects of special needs in children and develop better attitudinal programmes, which in turn facilitate competencies of the teachers.

STEPWISE MULTIPLE REGRESSION ANALYSIS

To know how far and to what extent the independent variables are influencing the dependent variables, stepwise multiple regressions are used. This analysis predicts the contribution of independent variables to the dependent variable.

TABLE 5: STEPWISE MULTIPLE REGRESSION ANALYSIS

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	β Coefficient	Individual Contribution (R^2)	Percentage wise Individual Contribution
Awareness	Nature of School	0.566	0.411	41 percent
	Training in Special Education	-0.185	0.439	43 percent
	Gender	0.085	0.446	44 percent
	Location of the School	0.125	0.193	19 percent
Attitude	Nature of School	0.564	0.318	31 percent
Existing Competencies	Nature of School	0.640	0.490	49 percent
	Training in Special Education	-0.190	0.523	52 percent

The stepwise multiple regression analysis in table 5 clearly reveals that gender, training in special education and nature of school are the significant predictors to the awareness of teachers by contributing 44, 43 and 41 percent respectively. By contributing 31 percent the variable nature of school stands as a prime predictor for attitude of teachers towards children with special needs. Likewise, the variable nature of school and training in special education contribute 49 and 52 percent respectively to the dependent variable existing competencies. So while organizing training programmes to the normal school teachers' one should keep in mind these variables.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study reveal that in all the aspects the normal school teachers demonstrated only moderate level of attitude and competency irrespective of their awareness. It means, on certain aspects even though they are aware of the aspects superficially they are not clear in their attitude on different aspects of disabilities in children. It in turn reflected in the form of moderate competency. This result gives vast scope for organization of sensitization; attitudinal building and need based training programmes to the normal school teachers to handle children with disabilities in normal schools. As integrated education is gaining momentum in India, the teachers working in normal schools should be geared up with adequate knowledge, proper attitudes and competencies to deal children with disabilities. As such the RCI, DIETs and the Special Education Departments should organize one to two months need based training programmes to these teachers incorporating specific and multiple disability concepts. A Training and Teaching Manual on the different aspects of disabilities in the form of Handbook should be prepared and supplied to each teacher working in the schools. Similarly, there is a need to appoint resource teacher or specialist teacher who can assist the teachers to handle children with mild and moderate disability and support the students with severe disabilities individually. Every school must be provided with a resource room with adequate teaching learning materials that promote independent learning of the disabled children with and without teachers support. Community networks can be established by involving governmental and non-governmental organizations that can support and give guidance and counselling the parents and children with disabilities in their personal and social life. This inturn sensitize the governmental and non-governmental organizations to incorporate the disability concepts in their development and welfare programmes.

As the study clearly reveals that there is a positive significant correlation between awareness & attitude, awareness & existing competencies, and attitude & existing competencies of the normal school teachers, there is a need to integrate the awareness, attitude and competency development programmes in one umbrella by involving print as well as electronic media. Audio and video cassettes can be developed on different aspects of disabilities such as concept of disabilities, etiology of disabilities, ways and means of identification & assessment, development of educational programmes keeping in mind the strengths and weaknesses of disabled children, providing guidance & counseling appropriately to the parents and children with disabilities. Such audio and video cassettes can be supplied to all the normal schools and teacher training institutions. The national bodies like NCERT and RCI in collaboration with special education Departments at University and College level should develop such audio and video cassettes and the same can be supplied to the schools. The stepwise multiple regression reveals the influence of independent variables – nature of school, training in special education, and gender on the dependent variables – teachers' awareness, attitude and exiting competencies in dealing children with disabilities. So, while selecting personnel for teaching and giving training to them, these variables should be bear in mind.

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TABLE

TABLE 3: MEAN AND SD OF THE ATTITUDE SCORES OF NORMAL SCHOOL TEACHERS TOWARDS INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AMONG CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS AND THE CALCULATED t- VALUES.

Independent Variables	N	Attitude		Calculated t / F- Values	Existing Competency		Calculated t / F- Values
		Mean	SD		Mean	SD	
(1)	150	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Gender							
Men	46	150.65	14.17	2.87**	87.90	11.25	3.54** 't'
Women	104	154.97	19.97		92.41	17.37	
Age							
20 – 30 years	11	154.49	16.98	3.92**	91.85	14.96	4.78** 'F'
31 – 40 years	30	151.75	17.98		89.95	15.73	
41 – 50 years	90	148.38	13.10		84.40	16.65	
51 years & above	19	161.11	24.28		93.11	17.58	
Educational Qualification							
Teacher Training (DITs)	15	152.64	17.93	3.67**	85.56	14.93	4.64** 'F'
Graduate with B.Ed.	45	154.72	15.66		84.10	15.14	
Graduate with B.Ed. & M.Ed.	25	148.68	16.61		87.82	11.88	
Post Graduate with B.Ed.	55	145.45	19.74		86.95	10.46	
Post Graduate with B.Ed. & M.Ed.	10	162.25	20.67		94.75	17.25	
(1)	150	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Training in Special Education							
Attended	130	158.14	19.31	8.61**	96.34	13.69	14.36** 't'
Not attended	20	150.52	16.63		87.45	13.33	
Years of Experience							
1 – 5 years	15	152.14	19.31	8.61**	86.34	17.77	14.36** 'F'
6 – 10 years	40	150.52	16.63		87.45	87.45	
11 – 15 years	60	148.22	14.23		85.27	85.27	
15 – 20 years	15	146.03	13.40		86.88	86.88	
21 years & above	10	158.75	14.94		95.91	85.91	
Nature of School							
Government School	110	148.38	12.51	15.63**	85.48	9.73	22.47** 't'
Government Aided Private School	40	174.55	21.45		113.07	13.97	

* Significant at 0.05 level
 ** Significant at 0.01 level

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