

Raising Awareness of Speech and Language Disorders among School Teachers: Helping teachers to recognize and support students with speech and language problems

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.52403/ijhsr.20250319>

ABSTRACT

Aim: The study aimed to assess teachers' general awareness, specific knowledge, attitudes, and practices regarding speech and language disorders.

Method: A structured questionnaire was developed and validated, covering sections such as biographic data, general awareness, and specific disorders including voice, speech, and language. It was administered to 70 teachers.

Results: The researchers analyzed the data using percentage analysis to determine the level of awareness among teachers. This method provides a clear representation of the distribution of responses. Key findings indicates that 84% of teachers are aware of speech and language disorders; however, gaps exist in their understanding of specific disorders. Teachers with more than 10 years of experience demonstrate greater awareness and more positive attitudes toward these children, however, 45% of teachers remain lack of knowledge about the characteristics of disorders such as articulation problems, stammering, and voice issues. While many teachers recognize the importance of speech therapy and refer children to speech-language pathologists, there is still a need for improved understanding of the specific causes and characteristics of these disorders.

Conclusion: The findings suggest a need for targeted professional development focusing on increasing teachers' understanding of specific disorders such as articulation problems, stammering, and voice issues, as well as their causes, to better support children with speech and language difficulties in the classroom.

Keywords: Teachers, awareness, speech-language disorders, communication and delayed development

INTRODUCTION

Speech-language pathology offers services ranging from screening to diagnosis and

management of speech, language, communication, cognition, and swallowing disorders. These professionals play a key

role in addressing common childhood disorders, such as language difficulties that affect around 5% of school-aged children. Early intervention is crucial, as untreated language disorders can lead to long-term academic and social challenges. Teachers are essential in identifying and supporting children with language disorders, which often present as reading or behavioral issues. A study conducted on teachers' attitudes toward public school speech pathology services found no significant relationship between teachers' demographic characteristics and their attitudes, highlighting the importance of supporting children with language difficulties through awareness campaigns like the ralli campaign. Studies like [2] showed higher occurrences of vocal nodules and laryngitis among day care teachers compared to a control group, highlighting the need for greater awareness of language disorders, as noted by [3]. A study by [4] noted that while over 90% of teachers had encountered individuals with stuttering, their awareness of its characteristics and causes was limited. A review by [5] emphasized the need for teacher training in speech, language, and communication disorders, highlighting specific areas where training is most needed. This is critical for avoiding mislabeling children and implementing effective interventions. [6] Explored school staff perceptions of speech and language therapy services in mainstream schools, suggesting that collaboration between speech-language therapists (SLTs) and teachers benefits both children and staff. Studies also suggest a need for greater awareness of speech-language disorders among teachers, particularly in rural areas, to help with early identification and intervention.

Several studies have explored public awareness and teacher knowledge about speech-language pathology and related issues. [7] The study surveyed teachers' attitudes toward the inclusion of children with hearing impairments and found a need for interventions to promote positive

attitudes for successful inclusive education. [8] Found limited public awareness and knowledge of speech-language pathology at the University of Amman. Similarly, [9] emphasized that the public lacks awareness of the role of speech-language pathologists, their services, and the profession itself. [10] Reported high awareness of vocal hygiene (93.5%) among secondary school teachers, but only 58% sought treatment for voice disorders. [11] Discovered that early diagnosis of hearing impairment improved school performance, particularly when diagnosed within six months of birth, though many parents were unaware of early intervention options. [12] Assessed educators' awareness of hearing loss effects and resources, revealing a significant need for increased communication about hearing loss and available accommodations. [13] Suggested that changes to service delivery are necessary at multiple levels to improve outcomes for children with speech, language, and communication needs (SLCN) and provide better support for families and professionals. [14] A teacher training program on speech and language development significantly improved teachers' perceptions of oral and written language development, but had no effect on their views about appropriate developmental practices. [15] Found that teachers' awareness of speech and language development helped them distinguish stuttering from normal non-fluency, aiding in appropriate referrals for intervention.

Further studies have examined the awareness and effectiveness of teachers' knowledge regarding speech, language, and communication disorders. [16] Showed that a lecture significantly improved pre-primary school teachers' awareness of speech and language development and disorders in Lucknow. [17] Found that communication disorders were more common in males (2.38%) than in females (1.91%). [18] Observed limited awareness of communication disorders in children among primary and secondary school teachers. [19] Discussed teachers' capacity to include

students with Developmental Language Disorder (DLD) and recommended improvements in teacher education and professional learning. Similarly, [20] emphasized teachers' roles in making classroom adjustments for children with DLD. Lastly, [21] investigated teachers' perspectives on teaching children who stutter, focusing on challenges related to recognition, intervention, classroom communication, and academic support. Overall, the findings emphasize the importance of improving teacher knowledge of speech and language disorders to support better outcomes for affected children. Studies have explored teacher's awareness of speech-language related specific disorders such as stuttering, aphasia, and autism, highlighting the need for improved knowledge in educational setting. Teachers play a crucial role in raising awareness, particularly in rural areas, by using educational workshops and community

programs to help parents identify speech and language disorders early. While research on teachers' awareness exists in other countries, there is a need to focus on this issue in our local context to address specific cultural and educational challenges unique to our region. The main aim of the study is to assess school teachers' awareness of speech and language disorders. The objective is to evaluate their understanding of issues related to speech, language, fluency, voice, and articulation problems.

MATERIALS & METHODS

Participants

A total of seventy (70) school teachers (11 male and 59 female) from various schools in Hyderabad were randomly selected for the study. The participants' ages ranged from 20 to 57 years, with a mean age of 35.74 years. The teachers were grouped according to their teaching experience, Table 1.

Table 1: Shows the no. of participants according to their experience

Teaching Experience	Number of Participants
0-5 years	31
6-10 years	18
Above 10 years	21

Material

A questionnaire, containing statements related to awareness of speech and language disorders was developed in the English language. It was divided into two sections and described as follows;

Section I: Demographic Data

The section gathers demographic information from school teachers, including name, age, gender, qualifications, teaching experience, medium of instruction, teaching grades, school name, and class size.

Section II: Various Speech-Language Disorders

The second section was further divided into five sub-sections based on various speech-language disorders.

A. Speech Problems

It includes 10 questions on general awareness of speech and language

disorders. Of these, 9 are multiple-choice with yes/no/not sure options, and 1 is a multiple-choice question requiring the selection of the correct option.

B. Language Problems

This focuses on awareness of language disorders, consisting of 5 questions. Questions 1, 2, and 5 are yes/no/not sure options, while questions 3 and 4 require choosing the correct answer.

C. Articulation Problems

This focuses on awareness of articulation problems, containing 4 questions. Questions 1, 2, and 4 are yes/no/not sure options, while question 3 is a multiple-choice question with the correct option selection.

D. Voice Problems

This addresses awareness of voice problems and contains 4 questions. Questions 1 and 4 are yes/no/not sure

options, and questions 2 and 3 involve selecting the correct option.

E. Fluency Problems

This assesses awareness of fluency, with 4 questions. Questions 1 and 4 use yes/no/not sure options, while questions 2 and 3 require choosing the correct option.

The final version of the questionnaire was validated by five experienced speech-language pathologists and subsequently distributed to a randomly selected group of school teachers from ten different schools in Hyderabad.

PROCEDURE

Prior to the research, all participants were instructed to sit comfortably in a well-lit and air-conditioned room to ensure a conducive environment for participation. The final questionnaire was then distributed, and participants were asked to complete all the questions. Clear instructions on how to fill out the questionnaire were provided, and consent was obtained from all the teachers.

Analysis

Percentage analysis was done to check the awareness of teachers about the knowledge regarding speech and language disorders

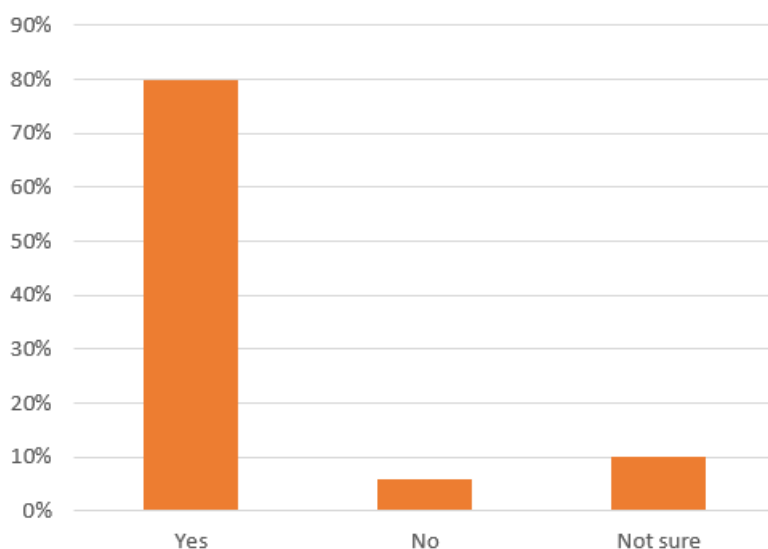
RESULTS

The results of the current study were explained in various sections such as general awareness, awareness of articulation problem, fluency disorders, voice disorders and language disorders.

Section I: General Awareness about Speech and Language Disorders

This section includes 10 questions regarding general awareness of speech and language disorders among teachers. The results were explained as follows;

1. Out of 70 teachers, 84% are aware of speech and language problems, 6% are unaware, and 10% are unsure. These results are illustrated in Graph 1.1.



Graph 1.1: Shows the analysis of question one.

2. Out of 70 teachers, 84% have encountered children with speech and language problems, 10% have not, and 6% are unsure.
3. Out of 70 teachers, 83% reported having students with speech and language disorders in their classrooms, 8.6% reported not having any, and 8.6% were unsure.
4. Out of 70 teachers, 70% agree that the general public is unaware of speech and language disorders, 10% disagree, and 20% are unsure.

5. Out of 70 teachers, 64% agree that school teachers can identify students with speech and language problems, 23% disagree, and 13% are unsure. Additionally, many reported struggling to fully understand the nature of the problem.
6. Out of 70 teachers, 60% believe that children with speech and language disorders are as intelligent as their peers, 21% disagree, and 19% are unsure. Furthermore, many teachers noted that these children are often more active in extracurricular activities such as sports, painting, and dancing.
7. The analysis of teachers' attitudes toward children with speech and language disorders shows that 21% feel embarrassed and engage minimally with these children. However, 67% demonstrated a positive attitude, and 13% were unsure. Most teachers stated that when they identify a child with speech and language issues, they provide special care and engage more with the child. Teachers with more than 10 years of experience tend to have more positive attitudes than those in other experience brackets.
8. Regarding the spontaneous recovery of speech and language disorders without treatment, 39% of teachers believe these problems can resolve on their own, 44% disagree, and 17% are unsure. Some teachers noted that with proper interaction, stimulation, and care, improvement in speech and language is possible. The majority of teachers agree that speech and language therapy is essential.
9. When asked about referrals for children with speech and language problems, 3%

would refer to a paediatrician, 6% to an ENT specialist, 8% to a neurologist, and 83% to a speech-language pathologist.

Section II: Awareness of Articulation Problems

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This section includes four questions related to teachers' awareness of articulation problems. The results are summarized below:

1. Awareness of Articulation Problems

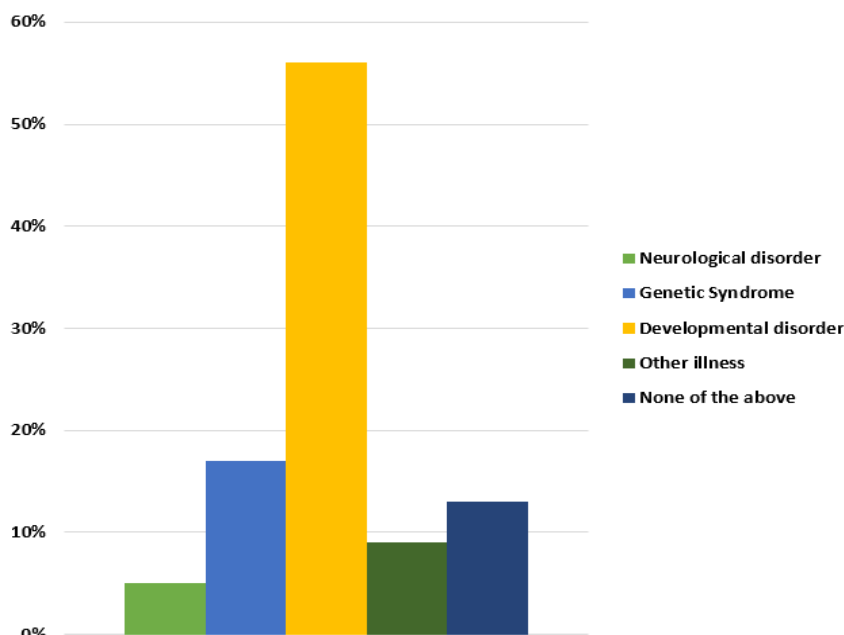
Out of 70 teachers, 51% are aware of articulation problems, 40% are unaware, and 9% are unsure. Additionally, some teachers reported that errors occurring during typical non-fluency were categorized as articulation problems.

2. Observation of Children with Articulation Problems

Among the 70 teachers, 80% have observed children with articulation problems, 9% did not know, and 11% were unsure. Most teachers reported errors occurring during the initial stages of typical non-fluency.

3. Causes of Articulation Problems

Teachers were asked to identify the causes of articulation problems. 5% attributed them to neurological disorders, 17% to genetic syndromes, 56% to developmental disorders, 9% to other illnesses, and 13% did not identify any of the listed causes. Due to their limited exposure (mainly in school settings), teachers most commonly identified developmental disorders as the cause of articulation problems. The findings are illustrated in Graph 2.1.



Graph 2.1: Shows the percentage of cause for the articulation problems.

4. Effectiveness of Speech Therapy

Out of 70 teachers, 67% believe that speech therapy can reduce articulation problems, 14% disagreed, and 19% were unsure. Teachers with 6 to 10 years or more than 10 years of experience showed higher awareness compared to those with 0 to 5 years of experience.

Section III: Awareness of Fluency Disorders

This section presents the results of four questions regarding teachers' awareness of fluency disorders. The findings are as follows:

1. Exposure to Stammering Problems

Out of 70 teachers, 67% have encountered a child with a stammering problem, 14% have had no exposure, and 19% are unsure. Teachers with more than 10 years of experience reported greater exposure to stammering cases compared to other experience groups. This aligns with ^[4], which found that while many teachers had encountered

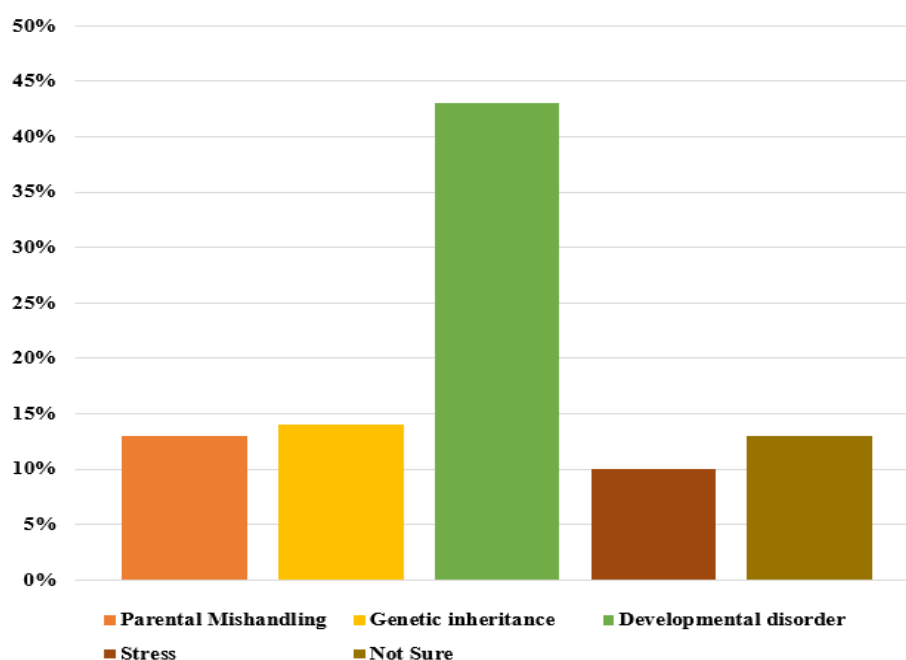
individuals with stuttering, their awareness of its characteristics and causes was quite limited.

2. Characteristics of Stuttering

Among the 70 teachers, the observed characteristics of stuttering were as follows: 13% identified prolongations, 3% recognized blocks, 14% noted hesitations, 20% observed repetitions, and 50% identified all of the above (though this recognition came after being familiarized with the terminology).

3. Causes of Stuttering

Regarding the causes of stuttering, 13% of teachers attributed it to parental mishandling, 14% to genetic inheritance, 43% to developmental problems, and 10% to stress. Additionally, 2% were unsure. Given their limited exposure (mostly within school settings), most teachers observed stammering primarily as a developmental issue. The findings are presented in Graph 3.1.



Graph 3.1: Shows the percentage of causes of stuttering.

4. Spontaneous Recovery of Stammering

Out of 70 teachers, 27% believe that stammering can recover spontaneously without treatment, while 60% disagreed, and 13% were unsure. Most teachers

considered stammering to be a temporary issue, often triggered by imitation or emotional states such as excitement.

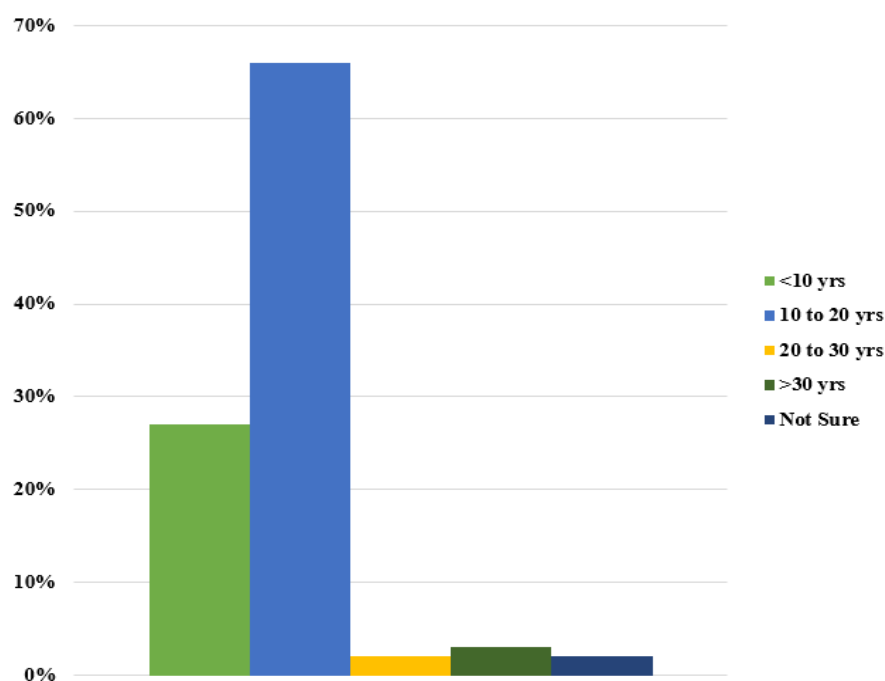
Section IV: Awareness of Voice Disorders

1. Exposure to Voice Problems

Out of 70 teachers, 79% have encountered individuals with voice problems, typically associated with throat infections or excessive voice use. 17% have had no exposure, and 4% were unsure. Teachers with 6 to 10 years of experience, as well as those with more than 10 years of experience, reported greater exposure to voice disorders.

2. Changes Observed in Voice During Development

When asked about voice changes during development, 27% of teachers indicated these changes occur before the age of 10, 66% identified them between ages 10 and 20, 2% said between 20 and 30 years, 3% cited ages above 30, and 2% were unsure. The findings are illustrated in Graph 4.1.

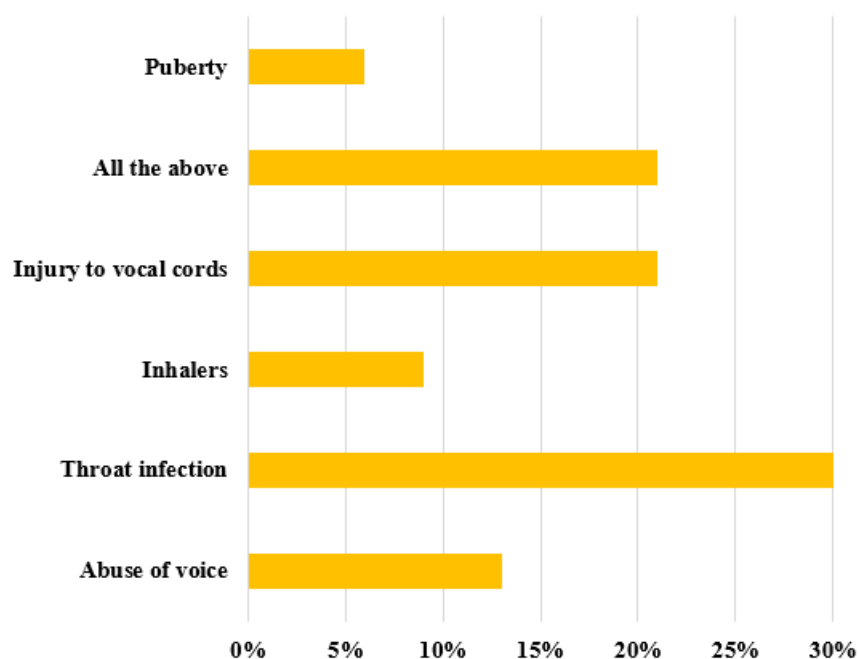


Graph 4.1: Shows the percentage of voice during development.

3. Causes of Voice Problems in Children

Regarding the causes of voice problems in children, 13% of teachers attributed them to vocal abuse, 30% to throat infections, 9% to medications like

inhalers, 21% to injury to the vocal cords, 21% to all of the above, and 6% to puberty. The data is shown in Graph 4.2.



Graph 4.2: Shows the percentage of cause of the voice problems.

4. Changes in Voice after Long Lectures

Out of 70 teachers, 80% reported changes in their voice after a long class or lecture, 13% did not experience any

changes, and 7% were unsure. The most commonly reported symptoms were sudden loss of voice and hoarseness. These issues were more frequently

reported by teachers with more than 10 years of experience. This is consistent with the findings of [4], which indicated that teachers are significantly more likely to experience various voice symptoms, such as hoarseness, discomfort while speaking, difficulty projecting their voice, and changes in voice quality, compared to non-teachers.

V. Awareness on Language Disorders

1. Impact of Early Language Learning on Academic Achievement

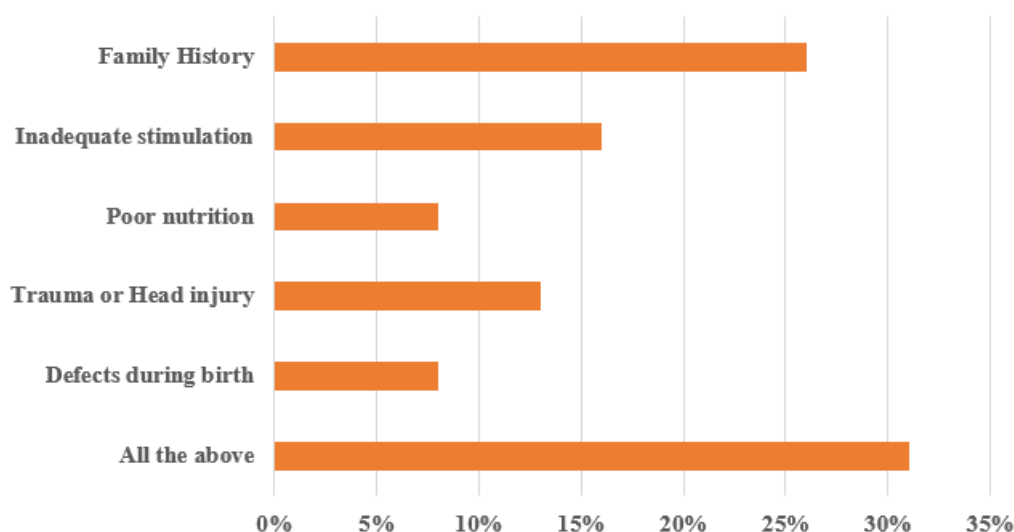
Analysing the effect of early language learning on academic achievement, the study by [22] supports the idea that the first three years of formal schooling are crucial for the transition to literacy. The results show that 39% of teachers agree, 56% disagree, and 6% are unsure.

2. Teacher Exposure to Language Disorders

The analysis of teachers' exposure to language disorders reveals that 39% of teachers have encountered children struggling with language comprehension and expression, 56% have not observed such issues, and 6% are unsure.

3. Causes of Language Problems in Children

Regarding the causes of language problems in children, 26% of teachers attribute them to family history, 7% to birth defects, 13% to trauma or head injury, 7% to poor nutrition, 16% to inadequate stimulation, and 31% identified all of the above as potential causes. The results are shown in Graph 5.1.

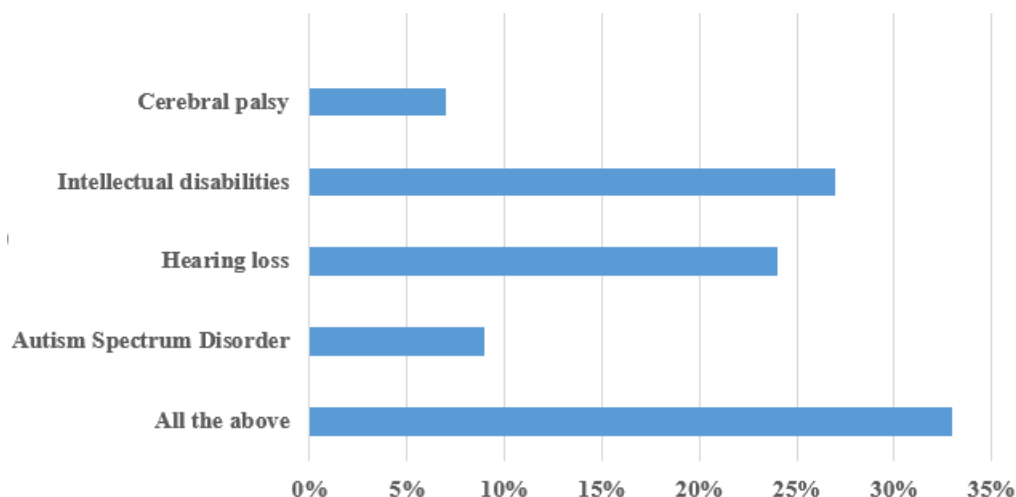


Graph 5.1: Shows the percentage of causes of language disorders.

4. Disorders Associated with Language Delay

The analysis of disorders associated with language delay reveals that 9% of teachers believe it occurs in children with autism spectrum disorder, 24% in

those with hearing loss, 27% in children with mental retardation, 7% in those with cerebral palsy, and 33% identified all of the above as associated with language delay. The findings are illustrated in Graph 5.2.



Graph 5.2: Shows the percentage of delay of language in various disorders.

5. Treatment of Language Disorders

When asked about the treatment of language disorders, 78% of teachers believe language can be improved with therapy, 65% disagree, and 16% are unsure. Teachers with more than 10 years of experience showed greater awareness of treatment options compared to other experience groups.

Group Differences

The analysis revealed differences between experience groups in response to six questions: attitudes toward children with speech and language disorders, awareness of treatment for articulation problems, exposure to stammering and voice disorders, changes in voice after long classes, and treatment of language disorders. In all these areas, teachers with more than 10 years of experience demonstrated higher awareness.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide valuable insights on the awareness of various speech and language disorders among Hyderabad school teachers, highlighting both strengths and areas for improvement in their knowledge. As school teachers play a pivotal role in identifying and supporting children with speech and language disorders, the results highlight the critical need for targeted teacher training and awareness initiatives.

General Awareness of Speech and Language Disorders

The study found that 84% of teachers are aware of speech and language disorders. However, 10% of teachers were confused, unsure, suggesting a potential gap in knowledge that could impact the early identification of affected children.

Articulation Problems

When it comes to articulation issues, 51% of teachers were aware of them, while 40% didn't recognize them at all. This suggests that while articulation problems are quite common, many teachers might not identify them as a distinct speech issue. However, 80% of teachers mentioned they've had students with articulation challenges in their classrooms, which aligns with previous research showing that articulation disorders are frequently seen in schools ^[4]. Interestingly, most teachers linked these challenges to developmental disorders, and a large portion (67%) believed that speech therapy could be effective in addressing them. This indicates that although teachers' understanding of articulation problems isn't perfect, there's a growing awareness of how therapy can help improve speech outcomes.

Fluency Disorders

Teachers generally had a moderate level of awareness about fluency disorders, especially stammering, with 67% reporting that they had encountered children who

stammer. Half of the teachers were able to identify the main signs of stuttering, but many were unfamiliar with some of its subtler aspects, like blocks or hesitations. Most teachers believed stuttering was caused by developmental issues, while fewer attributed it to stress or parenting factors. However, 60% of teachers didn't think stuttering would resolve on its own, indicating an understanding of the need for professional support. This aligns with previous studies, which suggest that teachers often have limited knowledge of the causes of stuttering, making it more challenging for them to provide effective support to affected students ^[4].

Voice Disorders

According to the study, 79% of teachers have dealt with pupils who have difficulty speaking. Teachers with more than 10 years of experience were exceptionally skilled at identifying these issues in their students. Many teachers reported hearing changes in their own voices after giving lengthy lectures, which is a common difficulty in the area ^[23]. These findings indicate that teachers who are knowledgeable with reasons such as throat infections, vocal strain, and vocal cord injuries are better able to identify these concerns in their children. Overall, it demonstrates how instructors are becoming more aware of voice disorders and the importance of school-based programs to promote vocal health.

Language Disorders

The study found that teachers had varying amounts of understanding about language problems. About 39% said they worked with children who had difficulty with language, but they didn't all agree on how important early language skills are for success in school. Many teachers mentioned different reasons for language difficulties, such as family history or trauma, and most (78%) thought therapy could help with these challenges.

Impact of Teaching Experience

An important finding of this study is the role of teaching experience in shaping teachers' awareness of speech and language disorders. Teachers with more than 10 years of experience consistently demonstrated higher levels of awareness across various domains, including attitudes toward affected children, exposure to specific disorders, and knowledge of treatment options. This finding shows how an experience of teachers is important in providing better support to children with speech and language problems. It also specifies that ongoing professional development is necessary, so new teachers are just as prepared to recognize and address these challenges.

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

While this study gives useful insights into teachers' awareness of speech and language disorders, it does have some limitations. The sample size was fairly small, with only 70 teachers, and it was focused on one region (Hyderabad), so the findings might not apply everywhere. Future research could focus at larger and more diverse groups to see if the results hold up more widely. The study also relied on self-reported data, which can be biased, and didn't look at how well teachers are actually using their knowledge in the classroom. It would be helpful for future studies to explore how effective teacher training programs are in helping teachers apply what they know when dealing with speech and language issues.

CONCLUSION

Many teachers today don't have enough knowledge about speech and language disorders, which can slow down children's ability to communicate. To address this, the authors of the study wanted to stress how important it is for teachers to be more aware of these issues, especially those related to articulation, fluency, voice, and other speech and language problems. While

numerous educators understand these challenges, there remain some knowledge deficiencies that hinder their ability to identify and aid children who require support. The research highlights the importance of offering teachers further training and professional development to supply them with the necessary tools and knowledge to effectively assist these students.

Declaration by Authors

Ethical Approval: Approved

Acknowledgement: The authors expressed their gratitude to all the participants for their valuable contributions to this study.

Source of Funding: N/A

Conflict of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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- How to cite this article: Vishala, E., Prasad, H. G., Lakshmi Prasanna, P., Srujana, V., Imran, M. A., Niranjan, N., Janardhan, M., & Naresh, C. Raising Awareness of Speech and Language Disorders among School Teachers: Helping teachers to recognize and support students with speech and language problems. *Int J Health Sci Res.* 2025; 15(3):118-130. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.52403/ijhsr.20250319>
