

# Faculty Attitudes Toward Students With Learning Disabilities in Higher Education Institute in Lebanon

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Students with learning disabilities (LD) face several academic issues because of their inabilities. Learning disabilities are characterized as a blended group of disorders shown by critical challenges in obtaining and utilization of tuning in, talking, perusing, composition, thinking, or scientific capacities (National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities [NJCLD], 1994). Examiners clarify that learners with LD are at danger for dropping out of school because of the anxiety of managing social, emotional, and scholarly requests, alongside the test of figuring out how to adapt to their inabilities (Harris & Robertson, 2001). Consistently an expanding number of learners with disabilities are moving on from secondary school and going into post-secondary education. The purpose of this study is to examine the attitudes and practices of faculty members in a private university in Lebanon towards inclusion of students with disabilities. The survey approach will be used to collect the data. A total of 50 faculty members, full time and part time instructors, are needed to participate in the study. The purpose is to understand how faculty members perceive, deal, and accommodate students with learning disabilities. Results showed instructors having positive attitude toward students with learning disabilities. They are willing to accommodate by extending exams time and projects.

*Keywords:* Learning disabilities, faculty members, higher education, attitudes

## Introduction

The number of students with learning difficulties at universities has been expanding as a consequence of laws aiming for guaranteeing instructive open doors for all learners. Learners with difficulties are among the unavoidably various learners population of today's universities. The need to suit these learners has turned into an exceptional challenge for university heads, instructors, and personnel who must regulate arrangements, techniques, and support services that will guarantee equity of instructive chances for those learners (Vogel, Leonard, Scales, Hayeslip, Hermansen & Donnells, 1998).

Over the past twenty years, schools in Lebanon have faced a great increase in the number of students who have learning disabilities and are placed in general classrooms. With such increase in number of students with LD who are attending universities, faculty members are facing greater demand to understand LD, assess their attitudes toward learners with LD, and create effective techniques to deal with LD. In spite of the fact that consideration has expanded regarding how university administrators and staff can best serve learners with

inabilities, there are numerous instructors who are unaware of both the laws and requests identified with learners with disabilities (Rao, 2004). Cochran (1998) stated that school personnel have some comprehension of learning capacities and the needs of learners with learning difficulties. Furthermore, the way instructors see a learner can impact the state of mind they have towards them. Learners have the capacity to quickly understand the instructor's attitude towards them basically by their cooperation, their ease with accommodating their methods.

### **Individuals With Learning Disabilities**

To be able to fully understand what learning disabilities are, it is very essential to understand how the cognition works in the brain (Lerner, 1981). Mental abilities refer to the steps followed to take in, analyze, organize, and save information in the brain for later retrieval. These mental skills are important to the individual to be able to function thoughts, reason information, and be creative. Students with learning disabilities suffer from central processing or psycholinguistic dysfunction. In other words, their ability to analyze and use the data affects their learning process. These students need specialized teaching strategies. Swanson and Koegh (1990) stated three assumptions on how students with learning disabilities are perceived. First, they believed that learning disabilities are due to central nervous system damage. Second, students with learning disabilities do not function at their maximum level of potential intelligence. Third, if Academic failure occurs in one academic task in all subject matters, the individual might be diagnosed with mental retardation. Therefore, working with students with learning disabilities necessitates a comprehensible content that is structured in a way and individualized to aid the learning process of those students (Lewis, 1998).

### **Learning Disability Categories**

Learning disabilities are the most common disability identified at universities (Betz, Smith, & Bui, 2012). Dyslexia is the mostly represented among LDs (Roberts & Stodden, 2005). LDs are categorized in three domains: writing, reading, and math difficulty (National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2012). Students with reading trouble struggle with identification of words and spelling, apprehension, simplicity, and automation in reading (Fletcher, Lyon, Fuchs & Barnes, 2007) while math LDs involve problems in calculation. Writing LDs find difficulty in spelling, compositing, and have terrible handwriting.

Literature review revealed that students with dyslexia failed to reveal their disability since they feared mockery and unfairness (Child & Langford, 2011; Morris & Turnbull, 2006). Ridley (2011) had dissimilar results when examining students with dyslexia. Students stated that they felt relaxed in revealing their disability in classrooms. Dyscalculia is defined as several conditions that lead to difficulties in math abilities (Emerson & Babbie, 2010). A study revealed students with dyscalculia experienced hardship comprehending procedural skills relevant to numbers (Lyons & Beilock, 2011). Dysgraphia is defined by the difficulty in self expression in writing (Crouch & Jakubecy, 2007).

### **Accommodations**

There exist several accommodation techniques to assist students with LD such as adjustments in classroom, homework, and testing procedures (Washington State University, 2012). Technology might be included such as calculators, word processor, or tape recorder. The mainly common accommodation is time extension for exams (Nelson, 2012). However, a study showed that both students with LD and students without LD showed an increase in test scores when provided with extra time (Fuchs, Fuchs, Eaton, Hamlett, Binkley, & Crouch, 2000). Review of studies showed that students with LD did not benefit from extended test time (Alster,

1997; Camara, Copeland, & Rothchild, 1998; Ziomek & Andrews, 1998). Other accommodation method was less distraction examination setting. McCleary-Jones (2008) studied the accommodations offered by faculty members to students with LD. Results showed a lack of accommodation by instructors as well as they were unwilling to provide extra test time and quiet examination setting to students.

### **Literature Review**

In the 1980s, with the beginning of the Lebanese War, the topic of disability started to deepen the combined awareness and activate several non-governmental associations. Due to the civil war, associations were forced to create special education programs to assist students (McBride, Dirani, & Mukalid, 1999). The Ministry of Social Affairs was responsible for all topics related to disabilities. When it came to education, the Ministry of Social Affairs had to work with the Ministry of Education to provide best service. In a study done by McBride, Dirani, and Mukalid, results showed lack of policy concerning the accommodations for learners with disabilities. They concluded by developing a suitable assessment tool to guarantee students with special needs, an education in Lebanon which was when Public Law 220 was first approved by the Parliament. In 2000, the purpose of the law was to improve the living situation of individuals with disabilities. The parliament made use of the UN Standard Rules of Equalisation opportunities and the World Programme of Action Concerning Disabled Persons to set the ten parts of the law which involves definitions, classifications, the right to habilitated environment and transportation, the right to transport, housing, and education, the right to work, and fiscal rules. However, this law was not implemented until 2007 when Lebanon signed the Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Due to these laws, individuals with learning disabilities (LD), their families, and teachers became more knowledgeable of the options students have for higher education.

Due to the lack of studies on the topic of disabilities in Lebanon, Wehbi (2006) had to purely rely on his own observation to discuss special education in Lebanon. Wehbi explained that the difficulty to gather demographic and economic data made it hard to realize the assessment needs of learners with learning difficulties. A study by the Arab Resource Collective in 2007 showed that the majority of students with disabilities were placed in special schools and that private schools had the right to eliminate learners with disabilities. Therefore, few private schools, located in Beirut, created their own special education curriculum. Hatoum (2010) concluded that Lebanon lacks special education programs.

### **Assessment of Students With Special**

There are some categorization principles for LDs that are found in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM V-TR). Psychologists examine students by identifying discrepancy between the expected and actual achievement (Smith, 1998). This could be done using various methods such as divergence from grade level, standard score comparison, and expectancy formulas. Deviation from grade level depends on identifying grade level desires and the extent to which an accomplishment score is or is not equivalent with grade level (Kavale, 1987). The two most basic varieties of this strategy are consistent deviation, where the student deviation is major (Harris, 1975), and graduated deviation, in which the level of deviation between evaluation position and accomplishment shifts as an element of current evaluation arrangement (Bond & Tinker, 1973). Most of the times, grade level discrepancy methods have the tendency to misidentify learners who are near the breaking points of the low average aptitude, which over-distinguishes slow students and under-recognizes others with high aptitude (Cone & Wilson, 1981). Smith (1998) pointed out that, while one

method may show that a student is a serious underachiever and needing LD assistance, another may recommend that the learner is giving as expected. Indeed, even among learners who reach the level, anywhere in the range of 5 to 24% could be thought of as inclining toward LD (Evans, 1992). Another method that is used is the standard scores that minimize the disadvantages found in the grade level discrepancies. Using this method, the scores of the IQ and the achievement tests are evaluated for any discrepancies between 15 and 30 pts (Mercer, 1997). Researchers used the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC-III) and the Wechsler Individual Achievement Test (WIAT) and discovered that over 70% of the students are considered in the normal range (Ward, Ward, Glutting, & Hatt, 1999). The expectancy formula determines the discrepancy between the ability and achievement scores of the student (Mercer, 1997).

### **Attitudes toward Persons With Learning Disabilities**

It is essential to understand the attitudes of faculty members towards students with LDs since instructors play a vital role in the academic achievement of students. Studies have shown inconsistent results in such concern. Some studies revealed that faculty members have a positive attitude and are ready to accommodate (Becker, Martin, Wajeesh, Ward, & Shern, 2002; Bourke, Strehorn, & Silver, 2000). Studies also revealed that the lack of knowledge of faculty members towards type of LDs is highly correlated with negative perceptions toward those students (Murray, Lombardi, & Wren, 2011) leading to failure in providing suitable educational accommodations. Vogel (2002) believed that students are afraid to disclose their learning disability due to their fear of instructor's attitudes and willingness to accommodate for their needs. In addition, Johnson (2006) stated that negative attitude may prevent students from demanding accommodation. Leyser, Greenberger, Sharoni, and Vogel (2011) reviewed the results of several studies and concluded that women instructors expressed more positive outlook toward students with disabilities; more experienced instructors hold more positive attitudes; and instructors who received more training about disabilities have more positive views.

Attitude toward students with disabilities is a shame in the Middle East (Amr, 2011). Amr, examined student teachers who are majoring in education in ten different Arab countries and found out that they take very few courses related to special education. Therefore, they graduate with the minimal required knowledge on how to identify and accommodate for students with learning disabilities. Salih and Al-Kandari (2007) examined Kuwaiti teachers and concluded that by training teachers to accommodate, their attitudes toward students with disability improved. Lebanon lacks qualified special education teachers who are ready to accommodate and provide resources for students with disabilities (LPHU, 2003) so teachers are reluctant to teach those students. In higher education, the attitudes of teachers are not that different.

### **Significance of the Study**

Although instructors have professional knowledge in learning disabilities, little is known about their attitudes toward accommodating for those students. Instructors' views toward students with LDs could be regarded as an obstacle to students' success. This research focuses on providing information on how faculty members perceived students with LDs in Lebanon which is one of the neglected subjects in existing research. The relationship between faculty members and students play a vital role in determining the educational success of learners. Therefore, determining the type and quality of such interaction would help in understanding the difficulties students with LD are facing in universities in Lebanon. Studies have shown that faculty members' attitude toward accommodating for students with LD impact degree completion (Voel & Adelman, 1992); thus it is essential to try and comprehend their attitudes toward those students. The results of this study

could advance the knowledge on faculty members' attitudes and their willingness to accommodate for students with LD.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The goals of this research were (1) to describe the views of university level faculty members toward learning with LDs and the adjustments made for them, and (2) to evaluate the factors that influence the construction of instructors' views toward adjustments for learners with LDs.

### **Research Questions**

This research evaluated the views and adjustments done by faculty members at MUBS for learners with learning disabilities.

The purpose was to identify answers to the proceeding questions:

- (1) What are the views of instructors at MUBS towards learners with LDs?
- (2) What are the views of instructors at MUBS towards making adjustments for those learners?
- (3) What particular adjustments are approved by faculty members?

## **Method**

### **Participants**

This research was conducted in a private university in Lebanon. The targeted population was 50 full-time and part time instructors. This university has around 125 faculty members in four different campuses. There were 1,600 undergraduate and graduate learners registered at MUBS when this research took place. Eleven students have declared being diagnosed with learning disability when registering at MUBS. A total of 150 surveys were disseminated to instructors and 53 were returned. However, three were omitted since they did not fill out most of the survey.

### **Procedures**

After gaining approval from the IRB office at MUBS, a letter from the researcher was enclosed in every faculty member's course bin that states the purpose of the study as well as the survey. With the help of Students Affairs Office, the researcher collected all surveys from the bins after two weeks since only the Students' Affairs have the keys for. Some of these surveys were completed while others were left unfilled. To guarantee anonymity, no categorizing data were incorporated in the questionnaire. All data were collected in April of 2015. A short paragraph explaining the purpose of the study, and the estimated time needed to fill out the survey were presented at the beginning of the survey.

### **Instrument**

The survey instrument was created through several steps. First, the researcher reviewed previous studies on faculty attitudes and practices toward students with LD (Harris & Robertson, 2001; Roberts & Stodden, 2005; Child & Langford, 2011; Morris & Turnbull, 2006). This review led to some major themes related to the research; the Lebanese law related to disabilities, instructors' attitude, and faculty members' willingness to accommodate. Second, the researcher read prior used instruments to evaluate instructor attitudes. The instrument developed by Nelson, Dodd, and Smith (1990) was very helpful; therefore the researcher adapted and used three components of the survey instrument that fit the purpose of the study. The instrument is divided into four sections based: Descriptive information (e.g. gender, program of study, institute), the faculty

experience dealing with LD, Familiarity with LD, attitudes and accommodations for students with LD. The items were divided into Likert scale items as well as open ended short answer questions. Neslon, Dodd, and Smith distributed the survey to 141 faculty members teaching for the Education, Business, or Arts and Science Faculty. Results showed that faculty members are ready to adjust, but difference existed among members from different faculties.

### Analyses

All surveys were scanned and data was filtered to identify any miss-marked or double-marked answers. After, the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to evaluate the data including frequencies and descriptive statistics. The open ended questions were analyzed by identifying repeated codes. Correlation coefficients were calculated to evaluate any relation among faculty members to accommodate. Research question one was to report the views of faculty members of MUBS towards students with LDs. This question was examined using descriptive statistics and factor analysis was conducted on the items regarding this question. Research question two was to report the faculty members' willingness to accommodate for students with LDs. This question was also examined using description statistics. Research question three was to identify the accommodation strategies used by faculty members with students with LD. Factor analysis was used on the items of this question.

### Results

The most shared demographic features of the respondents from MUB were: females, have been teaching at MUBS for more than 2 years, age between 30 and 55 years old, and their professional title was an Instructor. The responses of the business department were over lapping other departments.

#### University Faculty Members Contact With Someone Who Has LD

The amount of contact with learners with LDs was also stated. The highest percentage of faculty members 80.7 % stated that they have been around someone with LD in a very limited way.

Table 1

*The Amount of Contact With Learners With LDs*

| Personal Contact | No contact | Very Limited | Taught few students less than 10 | Family Member | Self is Learning Disabled |
|------------------|------------|--------------|----------------------------------|---------------|---------------------------|
| Percentage       | 18.3%      | 80.7%        | 1.0%                             | 0             | 0                         |

#### Reported Knowledge Level

The next group of items described the self-reported understanding concerning legislation and the various types of LDs. The answers ranged from no knowledge to mastery level. The first item assessed their training level, only 4% taking less than 3 courses of training. The majority, 89% had no knowledge about Learning disabled while 7% had received one to two courses on special education. The second item evaluated their knowledge of the Lebanese law. The majority of faculty members 66% had little knowledge of the Lebanese Law and the rest had no knowledge of the law.

Several items were designed to evaluate faculty members' attitudes towards learners with LDs. 96.6% of instructors believed that students with learning disabilities belonged in universities and deserve a future. All faculty members disagreed on the statement that students with LD are "mildly mentally retarded". More than

75.8% stating they are supportive and would accommodate for students with LDs while 8.1% believed that it would not be fair to other students if they accommodate for students with LD and 16.1% believed that students with LD take up too much time of the instructor.

Table 2  
*Reported Knowledge Level*

| 1 Strongly disagree | 2     | 3     | 4 Strongly agree |   |
|---------------------|-------|-------|------------------|---|
| 0%                  | 0%    | 0%    | 100%             | Students with LD deserve to further their education in college.                                   |
| 0%                  | 2%    | 0%    | 98%              | Students with LD belong in college.   |
| 75.7%               | 22.3% | 2%    | 0%               | Students with LD only belong in vocational training programs.                                     |
| 98%                 | 0%    | 2%    | 0%               | Students with LD do not belong in college.  |
| 100%                | 0%    | 0%    | 0%               | Students with LD are "mildly mentally retarded"   |
| 100%                | 0%    | 0%    | 0%               | Learning Disabilities are not "real"  |
| 10%                 | 70.6% | 3.3%  | 16.1%            | Students with LD take up too much time of the teacher.  |
| 0%                  | 94.5% | 5.5%  | 0%               | Students with LD will have a difficult time getting or keeping a JOB                              |
| 0%                  | 5.6%  | 92%   | 2.4%             | Instructors should accommodate all students with a documented LD                                  |
| 9.1%                | 80.4% | 2.4 % | 8.1%             | Accommodations for students with LD are not fair to the other students.                           |
| 0%                  | 2%    | 92%   | 6%               | I will ONLY give accommodations if I believe it will not compromise the integrity of my course.   |
| 4%                  | 95.4% | 0.6%  | 0%               | I will NOT allow for accommodations for students with LD  |
| 0%                  | 1%    | 21%   | 78%              | I would like to have more training about various learning disabilities                            |
| 0%                  | 0%    | 18%   | 82%              | I consider my attitude toward students with Learning Disabilities as favorable and accommodating. |
| 17%                 | 83%   | 0%    | 0%               | I consider my attitude toward students with Learning Disabilities as guarded and skeptical        |

### Faculty Members Reported Accommodation

In regards to the items relating to accommodations, faculty members were willing to accommodate in two different categories: with documentation or without documentation. More than 82% are willing to provide students with extra time on a test as well as extend deadlines for class projects. As for allowing misspelling, incorrect punctuation, and poor grammar, 96% would not penalize students with LD.

### Discussion

The main goal of this research was to investigate faculty members' attitudes and accommodations toward students with LD in universities. The most important findings are, (1) that the majority of faculty members positively perceived students with LD, (2) females had more positive attitude than males, (3) the majority of participants did not know the Lebanese legislations for students with disabilities, (4) most of the faculty members were not trained to teach learners with LD, and (5) they would accommodate with extending time for tests and assignments. Results showed that even though faculty members had very limited contact with someone who has LD, they are willing to accommodation and had positive attitude toward those students.

Faculty did not perceive assisting students with LD as time consuming and restraining similar to prior studies done by Vogel et al. (1999) and Murray, Wren, and Keys (2008). Results showed no significant differences in faculty willingness to accommodate between full-time and part time instructors. The purpose of mailed survey was not only to collect data for the study but also to try and make instructors more aware of their own attitudes towards learners with LD.

The aim of this study ought not be underestimated in light of the fact that there is general agreement that states higher education instructors are untrained or do not have a collection of strategies in instructing students with special needs. Despite the fact that instructors in this study had the capacity to recognize examples of academic accommodations, it is not known to what degree staff know how to adjust or utilize generally planned methodologies for coming to learning with various needs. Further examinations concerning the comprehension of how instructors adjust would be needed.

### **Implications and Future Research**

The success in including students with learning disabilities in universities highly depends on the attitudes of instructors. This would require instructors to receive more training in accommodating and identifying students with LD. In Lebanon, universities need to review their policies and practices towards learners with learning disabilities. Potential studies need to stress on professional development of instructors across Lebanon. Another recommended study might include a longitudinal research every two to five years to evaluate if the training is assisting faculty members or not. Finally, a qualitative study that examines the lived experiences of faculty members dealing with students with LDs would provide a more lucid image on the accommodations implemented in classrooms.

### **Limitations**

The results of the study can't be measured precisely on the grounds that participants are not generally ready to give exact judgment to an inquiry because of their absence of experience; also, they may be unwilling to give honest data (Aaker, Jumar, & Day, 1998). Examination demonstrates that individuals regularly don't react precisely when gotten some information about sensitive issues or possible awkward positions that could be the case with this research (Bradburn, Sudman, & Wansink, 2004). Furthermore, the time span being analyzed can likewise be a potential issue in self-memory (Gershuny & Robinson, 1988). This issue was resolved by requesting that respondents review later exercises, subsequently giving an edge of reference to be viewed as that did not dive a lot into describing their past sentiments, dispositions, and encounters.

Some other limitations could be mentioned. One limitation for this study is that it has been conducted at one university which causes a restriction on the conclusions of the research. Another limitation is the honesty of participants in self-reporting. In addition, the sample size is another limitation. Due to the small number of participants, results cannot be generalized. Finally, instructors may have reacted all the more positively to this study on the grounds that it is considered more "socially attractive" to bolster individuals with disabilities than not to encourage them.

### **Conclusions**

This research strengthens prior studies conducted in different countries regarding faculty members' attitudes toward students with LD in universities. Results showed that the knowledge level on this topic is very



limited. Literature showed that the number of learners with LD is continuing to grow at higher learning institutions leading to the need for better training for faculty members to comprehend their needs.

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