

# Efficacy of Workshop on Learning Disability in Enhancing Knowledge and Competency of Mental Health Professionals

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## ABSTRACT

**Learning Disabilities (LD) are neurodevelopmental disorders that significantly impact academic performance, necessitating early diagnosis and intervention. The increasing prevalence of LD highlights the need for educators, school counsellors, and mental health professionals to be well-equipped to support affected individuals. However, many professionals lack formal training, which hinders their ability to manage LD effectively. The present study was carried out to evaluate the efficacy of a hands-on workshop in improving the knowledge and competency of mental health professionals, including Clinical Psychologists, Psychiatrists, Remedial Trainers, and Counsellors. A sample of 36 participants were involved in the study. Using a cross-sectional comparative design with pre- and post-evaluations, the study measured participants' knowledge and competency levels on LD concepts, assessment techniques, and intervention strategies. Results demonstrated a significant increase in knowledge post-workshop. Competency levels also showed substantial improvement across all assessed areas (Concept, Types, Assessment, Management, and Intervention), with notable gains in professionals reporting to be very competent and/or extremely competent post-workshop. Kendall's tau-b correlations indicated moderate to strong positive associations between various domains of competency, emphasizing the comprehensive impact of the workshop. The study concludes that in-depth, hands-on workshops are highly effective in enhancing the knowledge and skills of mental health professionals in managing LD, contributing to better support for children with LD.**

**Keywords: Learning Disabilities (LD), Mental Health Professionals, Workshop Efficacy, Knowledge Enhancement, Competency Development, Skill building**

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Learning Disabilities (LD) are neurodevelopmental disorders characterized by significant difficulties in reading, writing, arithmetic, or other academic skills, which are not consistent with the individual's overall intellectual abilities. The DSM-5 classifies these disorders as specific learning disorders, with subtypes such as dyslexia (reading difficulties), dysgraphia (writing difficulties), and dyscalculia (mathematical difficulties) (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). The prevalence of LD varies globally, with estimates suggesting that approximately 5-15% of school-aged children are affected (Fletcher et al., 2018). These conditions can have profound impacts on academic performance, social interactions, and self-esteem, necessitating early diagnosis and intervention.

The increasing prevalence of learning disabilities (LD) among children and adolescents has highlighted the importance of equipping educators, school counsellors, and mental health professionals with the necessary skills and knowledge to support this population. Professionals working with children who are having LD often encounter a myriad of challenges that impede their ability to provide effective support.

Research studies indicate that many educators and school counsellors feel inadequately prepared to address the unique needs of individuals with LD. It is alarming to note that a substantial proportion of professionals lack formal training in managing LD, resulting in limited knowledge and insufficient skills. (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 2006). Particularly, school counsellors and special educators often lack specific training in the identification and management of LD, which could hinder their ability to provide appropriate guidance (Milsom, 2002).

Scanlon (2013) highlighted that inadequate resources is a critical factor in the effective support of children with LD. Limited access to specialized instructional materials and trained personnel could compromise the implementation of

Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) to support the management of LD. In addition to training and resource limitations, systemic barriers can also impede from fully addressing the needs of students with LD, which include lack of knowledge on existing disability policies, adopting standardized testing procedures, and lack of administrative support (Kauffman & Badar 2013).

Workshops designed to address LD provide an essential avenue for professional development, offering participants a platform to enhance their understanding, skills and competencies in managing LD. The effectiveness of these workshops can be assessed through various dimensions including knowledge acquisition, skill development, behavioural and attitudinal changes and continuous learning which would enable sustained impact.

Swanson et al. (2003) reported that teachers who attended workshops on LD showed a substantial increase in their understanding of the diagnostic criteria, characteristics, and educational needs of students with LD. The study indicated a 40% improvement in knowledge, highlighting the workshops' effectiveness in filling knowledge gaps. Similarly, Sencibaugh (2007) found that participants exhibited better retention of information related to LD symptoms, intervention strategies, and classroom accommodations, even several months post-training.

Brown et al. (2019) emphasized that participants in a comprehensive workshop demonstrated improved competencies in using diagnostic tools, such as the Wechsler Individual Achievement Test (WIAT) and the Woodcock-Johnson Tests of Achievement. The study noted that participants were better equipped to develop and implement IEPs, tailor instructional strategies, and utilize assistive technologies. These practical skills are crucial for ensuring that students with LD receive personalized and effective support.

Beyond knowledge and skills, workshops also play a significant role in influencing participants' attitudes and behaviour towards children with LD. Wilkins & Nietfeld (2004) observed that educators who participated in LD workshops showed increased empathy, understanding, and a more inclusive attitude towards students with disabilities. The study found that workshops helped reduce stigma and misconceptions about LD, fostering a more supportive and inclusive educational environment. This change in perspective is critical for creating a school culture that values diversity and promotes the success of all students.

The long-term impact of workshops on professional growth is a vital consideration. Clark (2020) conducted a longitudinal study to assess the retention and application of knowledge and skills acquired from LD workshops. The study revealed that while participants exhibited significant improvements immediately following the workshop, there was a decline in knowledge retention over time without regular reinforcement. To address this issue, Clark recommended integrating continuous professional development (CPD) opportunities, such as refresher courses, online modules, and peer mentoring, to sustain and enhance the competencies acquired during workshops. Leach & Hall (2011) supported this view, suggesting that continuous engagement with the content and collaborative learning opportunities are crucial for long-term professional development.

The design and delivery of workshops significantly influence their effectiveness. Davis & Martinez (2021) emphasized the importance of incorporating interactive elements, such as case studies, role-playing exercises, and group discussions, to enhance participant engagement and learning. The study found that participants valued the opportunity to apply theoretical knowledge to real-world scenarios, which helped bridge the gap between theory and practice. Additionally, workshops with follow-up sessions, hands-on activities, and opportunities for collaborative learning were more successful in achieving meaningful and lasting impacts (Williams & Hepler 2022).

Literature consistently supports the efficacy of workshops in enhancing knowledge and competency among professionals working with individuals with LD. However, the success of these workshops depends on several factors, including the quality of the training, the qualifications of the instructors, and the engagement level of the participants. One of the critical factors identified is the need for ongoing professional development to reinforce and build upon the skills acquired during workshops. A one-time workshop, while beneficial, is often insufficient for sustained professional growth and the effective implementation of new strategies.

As the understanding of LD continues to evolve, it is imperative that professional training programs adapt to incorporate the latest research and best practices. The workshop should focus on addressing the challenges faced by professionals, such as the lack of specialized training, resource limitations, and systemic barriers. By equipping professionals with the necessary skills and knowledge, we can ensure that children with LD receive the optimum support they need to succeed academically and personally.

### **Objective**

To assess the efficacy of workshop on Learning Disability in enhancing knowledge and competency of Mental Health Professionals.

### METHODOLOGY

The present study was a cross-sectional comparative study with pre and post evaluation. The sample comprised of thirty-six mental health professionals including Clinical Psychologists, Psychologists, Psychiatrists, Remedial Trainers and Counsellors. Socio-demographic data sheet was used to profile the sample population. The data was obtained by using a questionnaire to assess the participants' knowledge. A 5-point Likert scale was developed by the principal investigator to measure competency. The questionnaire was used to assess participants' competency on LD concepts, assessment techniques, and intervention strategies. The competency level of the mental health professionals on concept of LD, types of LD, assessment, management and intervention modalities were compared. The evaluation was carried out pre and post the workshop.

In-depth hands-on workshop was conducted for mental health professionals. The workshop focused on providing a comprehensive overview of LD, including Concepts of LD, diagnostic criteria, comprehensive assessment, intervention strategies, and practical applications. Additionally, the workshop incorporated hands-on activities, essential skill building exercises, case studies, and opportunities for participants to share their experiences and collaborate with peers to help them in meaningful learning and skill development. The data was analysed using descriptive statistics and inferential statistics.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive statistics such as mean and SD were calculated for summarizing *Knowledge* scores on LD. A paired t-test was used for comparing mean scores of pre and post data.

**Table I showing pre and post-test knowledge of Mental Health Professionals**

Knowledge Score	N	Mean	Std. Deviation(SD)	Std. Error Mean
Pre –test Knowledge	36	3.08	1.71	.29
Post -test knowledge	36	8.22	2.06	.34

Table 1 shows pre and post-test knowledge of Mental Health Professionals. The mean pre-test knowledge score was 3.08 with a SD of 1.71, indicating moderate variability in initial knowledge levels. Post-test mean scores were found to be 8.22 with SD of 2.06. The standard error of the mean is 0.29 for the pre-test and 0.34 for the post-test, indicating a precise estimate of the population means. The variation in the scores indicates that there is a significant increase in the knowledge scores post workshop. The results suggest that while there is an overall improvement in knowledge, the variability scores also increased. These results demonstrate *a substantial gain in knowledge following the workshop, highlighting its effectiveness.*

**Table II Shows the paired t test scores comparing pre and post Knowledge scores**

Paired Differences				
	Mean	Std. Deviation	T	p
pre to post	-5.14	2.32	-13.3	.000

Table II shows t test scores comparing knowledge scores before (pre-test) and after (post-test) the workshop. The mean difference between the pre-test and post-test scores is -5.14, with a SD of 2.32. These scores indicate that there is a significant increase in scores following the workshop.

The t-value is -13.3, reflecting a substantial difference relative to the variability of the sample data. The p-value is .000 which indicates a statistically significant difference in the pre and post knowledge scores.

Overall, the results demonstrate a highly significant improvement in knowledge after the workshop, suggesting effectiveness of the workshop.

**Table III depicting Competency Levels of Mental Health Professionals Before and After the Workshop**

Sl. No	Competency Levels		Concept		Types		Assessment		Management		Intervention	
			Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
1	Not Competent	n	5	1	4	2	12	1	8	2	15	2
		%	13.9%	2.8%	11.1%	5.6%	33.3%	2.8%	22.2%	5.6%	41.7%	5.6%
2	Slightly	n	11	3	12	1	10	3	19	3	13	2
		%	30.6%	8.3%	33.3%	2.8%	27.8%	8.3%	52.8%	8.3%	36.1%	5.6%
3	Moderately	n	19	15	14	8	11	16	7	12	7	15
		%	52.8%	41.7%	38.9%	22.2%	30.6%	44.4%	19.4%	33.3%	19.4%	41.7%
4	Very Competent	n	1	16	5	20	3	13	2	18	1	14
		%	2.8%	44.4%	13.9%	55.6%	8.3%	36.1%	5.6%	50.0%	2.8%	38.9%
5	Extremely Competent	n	0	1	1	5	0	3	0	1	0	3
		%	0.0%	2.8%	2.8%	13.9%	0.0%	8.3%	0.0%	2.8%	0.0%	8.3%

The table III shows data on the competency levels of mental health professionals before (Pre) and after (Post) the workshop, across five domains: *Concept*, *Types*, *Assessment*, *Management*, and *Intervention*. Each row represents different competency levels (Not Competent, Slightly Competent, Moderately Competent, Very Competent, and Extremely Competent), with the number of mental health professionals and their respective percentages falling into these categories.

The "*Concept*" category assesses the understanding of fundamental ideas and theories related to LD. Initially, a significant portion of professionals felt they were not competent (13.9%) or only slightly competent (30.6%) in this area, indicating a lack of fundamental knowledge on LD. However, after the workshop, these numbers significantly decreased to 2.8% and 8.3% respectively, while the percentages of those feeling very competent or extremely competent increased from 2.8% and 0.0% to 44.4% and 2.8%. This shift suggests that the *workshop was highly effective in enhancing the mental health professionals' conceptual understanding, providing them with a stronger theoretical basis for their practice.*

The "*Types*" category evaluates the mental health professional's knowledge on different types of disabilities and their characteristics. Before the workshop, many of them felt slightly competent (33.3%) or moderately competent (38.9%), indicating some familiarity but not extensive knowledge. Post-workshop, the percentage of professionals who felt not competent dropped from 11.1% to 5.6%, and those feeling very competent increased significantly from 13.9% to 55.6%. This substantial improvement shows that the *workshop successfully expanded mental health professionals' understanding of the various types of disabilities, enabling them to better recognize and address the specific needs of students with LD.*

In the "*Assessment*" category, mental health professionals' abilities to evaluate and diagnose LD were measured. Initially, a large number of them felt not competent (33.3%) or only slightly competent (27.8%) in this area, highlighting a significant gap in assessment skills. Following the workshop, the percentage of those feeling not competent plummeted to 2.8%, and those who felt very competent surged from 8.3% to 36.1%. Additionally, those feeling moderately competent rose from 30.6% to 44.4%. These changes indicate that the *workshop was particularly effective in enhancing mental health professionals' assessment skills, providing them with the necessary tools and confidence to comprehensively evaluate LD and make an accurate diagnosis.*

The "*Management*" category assesses the professionals' skills in managing and supporting students with LD. Initially, a high percentage of mental health professionals felt only slightly competent (52.8%) or moderately competent (19.4%), showing that many felt underprepared to manage these children effectively. After the workshop, those feeling not competent dropped from 22.2% to 5.6%, and those feeling very competent increased from 5.6% to 50.0%. This significant improvement demonstrates that the *workshop facilitated professionals with practical management strategies, enabling them to better support and advocate for children with LD.*

The "*Intervention*" category evaluates the mental health professional's abilities to implement effective interventions for children with LD. Before the workshop, a substantial portion of professionals felt not competent (41.7%) or slightly competent (36.1%), indicating a lacuna in their intervention skills. Post-workshop, these percentages dropped to 5.6% and 5.6% respectively, while those feeling very competent increased from 2.8% to 38.9%, and extremely competent increased from 0.0% to 8.3%. This data suggests that the *workshop was highly effective in enhancing mental health professionals' intervention skills, providing them with practical approaches and techniques to better support children with LD through targeted interventions.* The overall results explain that the workshop has significantly enhanced the competency levels of mental health professionals across all assessed areas (Concept, Types, Assessment, Management, and Intervention). Before the workshop, a considerable number of professionals felt inadequately prepared, with high percentages reporting low competency levels. Post-workshop, there was a marked improvement, with increased

numbers of professionals feeling very competent or extremely competent. These results underscore the effectiveness of the workshop in equipping mental health professionals with the necessary knowledge and skills to better support and advocate for children with LD.

**Table IV Shows Kendall's Tau-b Correlations between pre- and post- test Competency levels of Mental Health Professionals**

Ordinal by Kendall's tau-b	Value	Asymptotic Standard Error	Approximate T	Approximate Significance
Concept	.494	.078	6.022	.000
Types	.479	.086	5.558	.000
Assessment	.513	.074	6.705	.000
Management	.564	.076	7.414	.000
Intervention	.609	.063	9.461	.000

Table IV represents the Kendall's tau-b ( $T_b$ ) coefficients, a measure of correlation for ordinal variables, examining the relationships between Concept, Types, Assessment, Management, and Intervention in the context of mental health professional's competency levels managing individuals with LD (Anesthesia & Analgesia, 2018)

On the domain of *Concept* of LD, the  $T_b$  coefficient was found to be .49 which signifies a moderate positive correlation suggesting that the professionals' theoretical understanding having a positive association with their competency levels across other measured domains.

On the domain of *Types* of LD, the  $T_b$  coefficient was found to be .48, which indicates a moderate positive correlation, which suggests that professional's knowledge on types of LD correlates moderately with their competency levels in other assessed areas.

On the domain of *Assessment*, a  $T_b$  coefficient of .51 signifies a moderate positive correlation, highlighting that mental health professional's assessment skills are significantly associated with their overall competency in supporting individuals with LD.

The  $T_b$  coefficient of .56 on the domain of *Management* of LD, demonstrates a moderate positive correlation, showing that mental health professionals' skills in managing and advocating for individuals with LD strongly correlate with their overall competency.

On the domain of *Intervention*, a  $T_b$  coefficient of .61 indicates a moderate positive correlation, emphasizing that mental health professionals' intervention skills strongly predict their competency across all assessed areas.

$T_b$  correlations across all domains are statistically significant with p-values of .00, indicating strong evidence of robust and reliable relationships between these variables in the context of mental health professional's competency in managing LD. The overall results in the present study demonstrate the effectiveness of the workshop in enhancing the competency of mental health professionals in managing LD.

### CONCLUSION

The efficacy of skill building workshops depend on the content and structure of the workshop. The role of expert facilitators in the workshop, who can provide guidance, answer questions, and offer real-world insights is also crucial in enhancing the impact of the workshop. The success of the workshop depends on the effective knowledge dissemination, ability to motivate and capture the participants' attention, facilitate interaction, clarification, and enhance the participants' skills and continuous learning. Results of the present study is an indication of fulfilling the above parameters in the success of the workshop. Thus, the results are a clear demonstration of the effectiveness of in-depth, hands-on skill training workshop in enhancing the knowledge and competency levels of mental health professionals in managing LD.

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