

Attitude of Elementary School Teachers towards Foundational Literacy and Numeracy in Relation to their Self-Esteem

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Abstract:

A key element of early education is Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN), which shapes students' academic and cognitive development. The term "Fundamental Literacy and Numeracy" (FLN) describes the fundamental reading, writing, and math abilities that kids must acquire during their early school years, usually by the end of Grade 3. These abilities are the cornerstones of future education and academic achievement. Promoting learning outcomes for students and preserving high-quality education depend heavily on teachers' attitudes toward FLN. Self-esteem is yet another crucial psychological component that affects educators' confidence, motivation, and general efficacy. The intent of this research is to look into how the self-worth of primary school teachers affects their views regarding FLN. The study will explore teachers' perspectives about FLN, assess their self-esteem, look at gender differences in self-esteem, and investigate the relationship between teachers' self-esteem and attitudes toward FLN.

Keywords: Elementary School Teachers, Attitude, Foundational Literacy, Foundational Numeracy, Self-Esteem

Introduction

As the foundation of human development, education is a potent tool for societal change, economic advancement, and personal empowerment. The early years of education are particularly important in the hierarchy of educational priorities because they establish the foundation for social, emotional, and cognitive development. The development of fundamental literacy and numeracy abilities is crucial during this foundational stage. The core competencies of reading, writing, comprehension, and arithmetic operations are all included in Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN), which forms the basis for subsequent learning. It is commonly acknowledged that a child's long-term academic progress, cognitive development, and socio-emotional well-being are significantly influenced by their attainment of FLN by the end of Grade 3 (UNESCO, 2016).

Globally, the importance of FLN has been emphasized by various international frameworks and educational policies.

As a national goal, universal FLN is prioritized in National Education Policy (NEP) of India, 2020, which acknowledges the urgent need to address these learning deficiencies (Ministry of Education, 2020). The strategy acknowledges that children may struggle to close learning gaps later in their

academic careers if they lack the core abilities necessary to understand increasingly complicated material in higher grades. It emphasizes the need for high-quality early childhood education and proposes measures such as activity-based and discovery-based learning to strengthen foundational skills. Moreover, NEP 2020 calls for teachers to adopt flexible, multi-level, play-based, and inquiry-based learning methods to ensure the acquisition of FLN by all children.

According to Fives and Buehl (2012), the successful implementation of FLN goals depends on a number of factors, but the most important one is the role of teachers, who serve as both facilitators of learning and architects of high-quality classroom experiences. Teachers' attitudes toward FLN, including their beliefs, perceptions, and willingness to adopt effective teaching practices have a significant impact on learning outcomes. Positive attitudes can lead to more engaging, child-centered pedagogical approaches that motivate and inspire students to attain foundational skills effectively. Conversely, negative or indifferent attitudes can hinder the effective transmission of these essential skills, contributing to persistent learning gaps. Teachers' self-esteem, or their perception of their own worth, competence, and professional capabilities, is another critical factor influencing their instructional practices and attitudes towards teaching. Rosenberg (1965) and Skaalvik & Skaalvik (2010) assert that teachers' motivation, resilience, job happiness, and general teaching performance are all significantly influenced by their sense of self-worth. Low self-esteem can manifest as emotional exhaustion, a lack of motivation, and a reduction in teaching effectiveness, whereas high self-esteem is often associated with more fervor, inventiveness, and commitment to the teaching profession.

Given the significance of attitude and self-worth, it is imperative to look into the ways in which these professional and psychological characteristics interact within the framework of fundamental education. Teachers' opinions toward FLN may be influenced by their self-esteem levels, which can affect their teaching methods and interactions with students. Understanding the relationship between these constructs is critical for establishing targeted interventions that improve teaching effectiveness and promote positive learning outcomes in students.

This study examines if there are gender-based differences in self-esteem and whether attitudes regarding FLN and self-esteem are related among primary school teachers. The information gathered from this study could help improve the quality of basic education in primary schools through the implementation of targeted teacher training programs, professional development activities, and legislative reforms.

Furthermore, the results could provide a platform for future studies on the effects of psychological dimensions like attitude and self-worth on teacher efficacy and student learning outcomes throughout the early years of schooling.

Review of Related Literature

The development of Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN), which encompasses fundamental reading, writing, and math abilities, is the cornerstone of successful early education. According to studies, kids who don't grasp these fundamental abilities by Grade 3 may have ongoing learning difficulties (UNESCO, 2016; ASER, 2022).

In order to meet FLN goals, teachers are essential. Their attitudes toward FLN encompassing beliefs, readiness, and willingness to adopt effective teaching strategies can significantly affect learning outcomes (Fives & Buehl, 2012). Positive attitudes are often associated with learner-centric practices, while negative attitudes may hinder FLN implementation (Sharma & Gupta, 2020).

Self-esteem, which symbolizes a person's sense of confidence and self-worth, is another crucial component impacting a teacher's efficacy. Teachers with high self-esteem exhibit better classroom engagement and emotional resilience (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010; Rosenberg, 1965). A positive self-image enhances professional motivation and correlates with effective teaching behaviors. Furthermore, gender differences in self-esteem among teachers have been explored in past research. Some studies report higher self-esteem in male teachers, while others find minimal differences (Robins et al., 2002). Understanding such variations can help in tailoring professional development and support systems more effectively.

The aforementioned reviews underscore the significance of investigating the interplay between attitudes regarding FLN and self-esteem, a topic that remains understudied in the context of elementary education in India. The current study will investigate how teachers' self-esteem affects their opinions and how gender may play a role in this relationship in attempt to bridge this gap.

Objectives

The study aims to explore:

1. The attitude of elementary school teachers toward basic literacy and numeracy.
2. The gender-related differences in primary school teachers' attitudes about basic literacy and numeracy.
3. How primary school teachers' self-esteem varies significantly depending on their gender.
4. The correlation between self-esteem and attitude towards FLN of elementary school teachers.

Hypotheses

1. Ho1: Gender does not significantly affect elementary school teachers' attitudes toward basic literacy and numeracy.
2. Ho2: There is no significant gender difference in elementary school teachers' self-esteem.
3. Ho3: Attitude of elementary school teachers toward basic literacy and numeracy and their self-esteem do not significantly correlate.

Delimitation of the Study

1. Only lower primary school teachers of Baksa District, Assam, more especially those in the Baska Education Block, are included in this study.
2. The sample of the study is limited to 120 teachers only.

Operational Definition

1. **Elementary School Teachers:** Elementary School Teachers refer to individuals who are professionally trained and employed to teach students at the elementary level, typically covering grades I to V or VI to VIII, depending on the educational structure of the region. They are responsible for imparting foundational literacy, numeracy, and basic skills across various subjects, ensuring holistic development in young children.
2. **Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN):** Children should possess the basic reading, writing, and math skills known as "foundational literacy and numeracy" by the conclusion of the early primary school years.

- 3. Attitude:** Attitude is the term used to describe a person's preferences, convictions, beliefs, and actions toward a certain object, concept, individual, or situation. It has cognitive, affective, and behavioral components. In order to quantify primary school teachers' quantifiable reactions to Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN), a standardized attitude scale comprising items rated on a five-point Likert scale from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5) is employed. Operationally, that definition is known as attitude.
- 4. Self-Esteem:** Self-esteem is the overall perception of one's own worth, value, and confidence. It displays people's perceptions of their own competence, acceptance, and self-respect.

Methodology

Research Method

In order to examine elementary school teachers' attitudes toward Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) in connection to their self-esteem, the current study uses a descriptive survey approach.

Sample & Sampling Technique

Stratified random selection was used to choose 120 Lower Primary School teachers as a sample.

Tools for Data Collection

Two standardized tools were used for collecting data:

- Attitude Scale towards Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) – Developed and validated by the researcher, based on FLN frameworks and existing literature.
- Self-Esteem Scale – RSES, (Rosenberg, 1965), has been used to measure self-esteem of elementary school teachers.

Data Collection Procedure

Data were gathered in person using a standardized questionnaire distributed to the selected teachers. Ethical factors such as informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary involvement were upheld throughout the procedure.

Statistical Techniques Used

The statistical methods listed below were used:

- Descriptive statistics like mean and standard deviation are used to assess the level of attitude and self-esteem.
- **t-test:** To evaluate gender-based variations in primary school teachers' attitudes toward FLN and self-esteem.
- **Pearson's Correlation:** to examine the relationship that exists between attitude toward FLN and self-esteem.

Analysis and Interpretation of Data

Objective 1: To investigate the attitude of elementary school teachers toward basic literacy and numeracy.

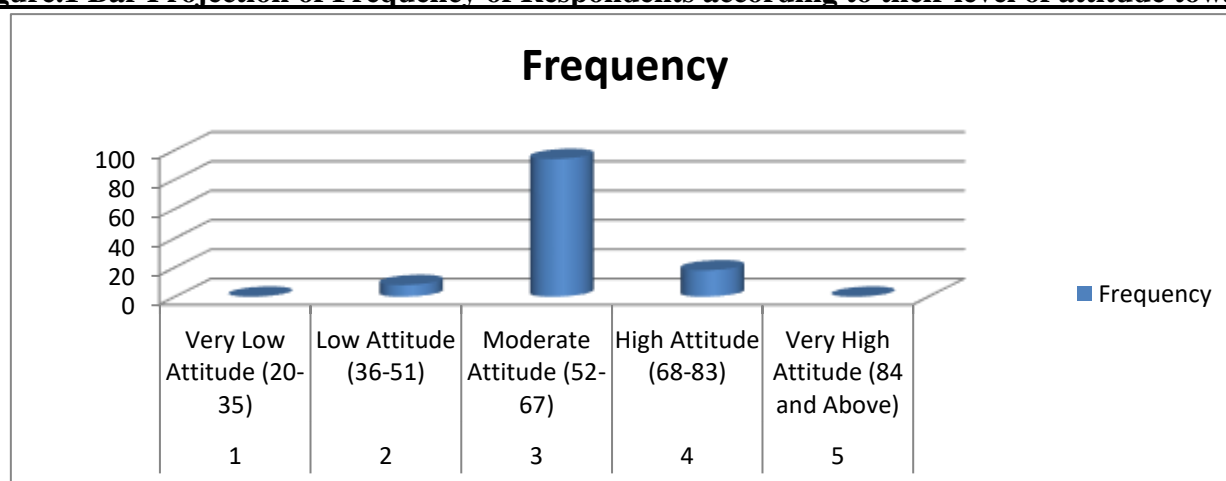
In order to investigate the attitude of elementary school teachers towards foundational literacy and numeracy the **Attitude Scale towards Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN)** was used which

was developed and validated by the researchers. The total score of each respondent on the scale indicates the level of attitude of his/her i.e, “Very Low Attitude”, “Low Attitude”, “Moderate Attitude”, “High Attitude”, “Very High Attitude”. In the **Table No.1** the frequency of the respondents has been indicated. The frequency of the respondents in each level has been shown through bar projection in **Figure.1**

Table No.1 Distribution of Respondents according to their level of attitude towards FLN

Serial No	Range and Level of Attitude	Frequency
1	Very Low Attitude (20-35)	0
2	Low Attitude (36-51)	8
3	Moderate Attitude (52-67)	94
4	High Attitude (68-83)	18
5	Very High Attitude (84 and Above)	0

Figure.1 Bar Projection of Frequency of Respondents according to their level of attitude towards



Based on the analysis of total attitude scores of primary school teachers it is evident that 8 respondents fall under “Low Attitude”, 94 respondents fall under the "Moderate Attitude" category and 18 respondents fall under “High Attitude” category.

Objective 2: To investigate the gender-related differences in primary school teachers' attitudes about basic literacy and numeracy.

H₀₁: Gender does not significantly affect elementary school teachers' attitudes toward basic literacy and numeracy.

Table No.2

Gender	N	Mean	SD	df	t	p-Value
MALE	60	59.98	6.78	118	-0.84	0.40
FEMALE	60	60.95	5.79			

From the Table No.1 it is found that male participants' average score is 59.98 and standard deviation is 6.78, while female participants' average score is 60.95 with a standard deviation of 5.79, as indicated in Table No. 2. In this case, the p-value is 0.40 and the computed t-value is -0.84. The difference in the mean scores of the male and female participants is not statistically significant because the p-value of 0.40 is higher than the generally recognized significance level of 0.05. The null hypothesis, according to which there is no difference between the groups, is accepted since it suggests that gender has no discernible impact on the scores. It is possible to draw the conclusion that elementary school teachers' perceptions of FLN do not significantly differ based on their gender.

Objective 3: To investigate how primary school teachers' self-esteem varies significantly depending on their gender.

Ho2: There is no significant gender difference in elementary school teachers' self-esteem.

Table No.3

Gender	N	Mean	SD	df	t	p-Value
Male	60	30.20	4.51	118	-0.44	0.66
Female	60	30.53	3.68			

The scores of the male and female participants were compared using the t-test. Male participants scored 30.20 on average with a standard deviation of 4.51, while female participants scored 30.53 on average with a standard deviation of 3.68. The test has a corresponding p-value of 0.66, a computed t-value of -0.44, and 118 degrees of freedom (df). The difference in the mean scores of the male and female participants is not statistically significant because the p-value of 0.66 is higher than the conventional significance level of 0.05. The null hypothesis, which states that there is no discernible difference between the two groups, is thus accepted. This suggests that there is no discernible relationship between gender and self-esteem ratings.

Objective 4: To investigate the correlation between primary school teachers' self-esteem and their attitudes toward basic literacy and numeracy.

Ho3: The attitude of elementary school teachers toward basic literacy and numeracy and their self-esteem do not significantly correlate.

Table No.4

Variables	N	Pearson's Correlation (r - Value)
Attitude Score		
Self-Esteem Score	120	-0.058

A very weak negative association between the Self Esteem Score and the Attitude Score is indicated by the correlation coefficient, which is -0.058, as shown in Table No. 4. There is hardly any correlation

between the two variables, as seen by the value of (r) being so near to zero. The null hypothesis (Ho3) has thus been approved.

Major Findings

1. The majority of primary school teachers (94 out of 120) exhibited a "Moderate Attitude" towards Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN).
2. A smaller proportion (18 teachers) showed a "High Attitude," while only 8 teachers fell into the "Low Attitude" category. None displayed "Very Low" or "Very High" attitudes.
3. There was no appreciable difference between male and female teachers' opinions about FLN (p-value = 0.40).
4. Similarly, no significant gender-based differences were observed in teachers' self-esteem levels (p-value = 0.66).
5. The study indicated no significant association between teachers' attitudes regarding FLN and their self-esteem, with a small negative correlation ($r = -0.058$) between the two measures.

Educational Implications

1. **Teacher Training and Professional Development:** Since most teachers displayed a moderate attitude towards FLN, targeted training programs could be designed to enhance their enthusiasm and commitment to foundational education. Workshops focusing on innovative, child-centered pedagogies may help shift attitudes from moderate to high.
2. **Policy Implementation:** The results highlight the necessity of policy changes that support the focus on FLN in the NEP 2020. To assist teachers in successfully implementing FLN initiatives, educational authorities and schools should provide priority to resources and support structures.
3. **Psychological Support for Teachers:** While self-esteem did not significantly correlate with attitudes towards FLN, fostering a positive school environment and providing mental health support could enhance teachers' overall job satisfaction and teaching efficacy.
4. **Gender-Neutral Approaches:** Treatments should focus on general strategies to improve teacher motivation and classroom procedures rather than gender-specific ones because attitude and self-esteem are not gender-specific.

Recommendations

1. **Enhance Teacher Training Programs:** Introduce regular professional development sessions focused on FLN, incorporating hands-on activities, peer learning, and mentorship programs.
2. **Develop Supportive School Environments:** Schools should establish cooperative forums where educators can exchange FLN-related issues and best practices, encouraging a culture of ongoing development.
3. **Incorporate FLN in Curriculum Planning:** Pre-service and in-service teacher education curriculum should incorporate FLN-focused modules to guarantee early and ongoing exposure to fundamental teaching techniques, according to educational planners.
4. **Conduct Further Research:** Extend the research to incorporate more extensive and varied samples from other geographical areas in order to confirm the results. Examine additional psychological elements (such as resilience and motivation) that can affect teachers' perceptions of FLN.

5. **Policy Advocacy:** Advocate for policies that provide schools with adequate resources (e.g., teaching aids, FLN-specific materials) to support teachers in delivering high-quality foundational education.

Conclusion

The study finds that there are no appreciable gender variations in primary school teachers' attitudes or levels of self-esteem, and that they typically have a moderate attitude toward FLN. Given the weak relationship between attitude and self-esteem, it is possible that other factors influence instructors' approaches to fundamental education more significantly. These results demonstrate how crucial systemic support, focused training, and policy alignment are to improving FLN implementation. By addressing these areas, stakeholders can empower teachers to effectively nurture foundational skills in young learners, ultimately contributing to the broader goals of equitable and quality education as envisioned in NEP 2020 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

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