

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.26725/JEE.2022.4.34.6920-6931>**Rural Community Teachers' Awareness and Attitude on Learning Challenges****S. Rajkumari and Ramya Bhaskar****ABSTRACT**

*In rural landscapes, teachers are unsung education heroes, facing challenges like limited professional growth, inadequate infrastructure, and the need to innovate teaching methods for diverse student needs. They shape their communities' education through adaptability and evolution. A September 2022 study conducted in Coimbatore district of Tamil Nadu surveyed 149 rural primary school teachers, using self-developed questionnaires on background information, awareness of learning challenges, and attitudes toward them. Reliability, measured with Cronbach's Alpha, showed scores of 0.829 for awareness and 0.854 for attitudes. Results revealed that most teachers had moderate awareness, with some displaying low awareness and many holding neutral attitudes, which could turn unfavorable over time. Linear regression highlighted associations with age, experience, and class type. Experience emerged as the main predictor for both awareness and attitude, implying that more experience leads to improved awareness and attitude. These findings can guide stakeholders in supporting rural educators, benefitting students across geographical boundaries.*

**Keywords:** Teacher; Rural community; Awareness; Attitude; Learning challenges ; Tamil Nadu

**INTRODUCTION**

In rural areas, access to quality education is often hampered by various challenges, including geographical remoteness, limited resources, and socioeconomic disparities. As the frontline agents of change in these settings, rural community teachers hold the key to unlocking the potential of their students and driving progress within their communities. Rural community teachers are the linchpins of educational advancement in rural areas. Rural teachers usually have a more distinctive and significant influence on students' lives. (Irvin et al. 2016). In comparison to urban environments, rural schools encounter

specific difficulties such as limited resources concerning facilities and non-teaching personnel, substandard school infrastructure, and a scarcity of teachers, especially those with adequate training, as these schools are not considered particularly appealing places to work (Bawane, 2019). Due to inadequate training, demanding administrative responsibilities, and a lack of non-teaching staff, many rural schools now have multi-grade classrooms, a high student-teacher ratio, and unsatisfactory levels of educational quality and curriculum outcomes (Annual Status of Education Report (Rural) [ASER], 2018).

Rural community teachers act as agents of change, inspiring their students to dream big and overcome the barriers of their circumstances. They play a pivotal role in nurturing young minds and talents that can contribute to the overall development of the rural community.

Effective resolution of learning challenges within rural communities hinges upon the profound influence of teachers' knowledge and attitude. Their awareness of the unique obstacles faced by students is the cornerstone of this endeavour. Armed with this awareness, teachers possess the ability to adapt their teaching approaches to cater to specific needs, thereby enhancing student motivation and academic outcomes. Furthermore, their knowledge or awareness equips them with insights that extend beyond traditional curriculum boundaries, allowing them to foster critical thinking and problem-solving skills in their students.

However, it is not just awareness but the positive attitudes of these educators that shape a transformative learning environment. Their constructive outlook fosters resilience and determination in students, inspiring them to overcome adversity. In addition to imparting subject matter knowledge, teachers become mentors who instil values of perseverance and self-belief. These attitudes also create an inclusive classroom atmosphere where every student feels valued and capable. A study by Zuniga et al. (2017) found that teacher knowledge was positively correlated with attitudes towards students with disabilities and substantial variances in knowledge and attitudes were observed due to the factors such as educational attainment, length of teaching tenure, and the nature of certification. They also found that teachers in rural areas faced challenges such as a lack of resources, training, and support for

inclusive education. The study suggested that improving teacher knowledge and attitude could enhance the quality of education for students with disabilities in rural settings.

The existing body of literature on rural teachers addresses various challenges in teaching, including poor working conditions, overloaded teaching and administrative duties, and lack of resources. While studies have explored these aspects individually, there is a noticeable gap in research on teachers specifically examining the awareness and attitude towards learning challenges of children. Despite studies on difficulties faced by rural schools, the focus has been limited in understanding how teachers perceive and respond to learning challenges. The identification of research gap emphasises the need for addressing teachers' levels of awareness and attitude towards children's learning challenges highlights the crucial role of rural community teachers in dealing with diverse learning challenges and promoting inclusive education. This research provides valuable insights for educators and policymakers, fostering collaboration to create an enabling environment for equitable educational opportunities in rural communities, and empowering students to reach their full potential. With this backdrop, the objectives of this study are:

- To determine the level of awareness and attitude of rural community teachers on learning challenges.
- To assess the relationship between awareness and attitude of rural community teachers regarding learning challenges.
- To examine the influence of socio-demographic variables on awareness and attitude of rural community teachers.

## METHODOLOGY

The research received ethical clearance from the Institutional Human Ethical Committee and adopted a cross-sectional research design. The investigation was carried out in September 2022, in Coimbatore district, Tamil Nadu state. Coimbatore was chosen for the study due to its status as a prominent educational hub in South India and its proximity to surrounding rural areas. Primary school teachers both male and female who instruct children from first standard to fifth standard were selected purposefully through convenient sampling. Five zones within Coimbatore guided the selection of three schools per zone based on the consent given by the school authority to ensure a comprehensive representation. Totally 514 teachers consented and participated in the study. Further, 149 primary school teachers from rural areas, working in rural schools was scooped out for the present analysis. To collect data on socio-demographic information, a self-developed questionnaire was designed, encompassing aspects such as age, family type, area of living, type of residence, educational qualification, and years of experience. Regarding the research instruments, an awareness scale was constructed with 57 statements. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement on a Likert scale with five response options, ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” The questionnaire included both positive and negative statements to capture a comprehensive understanding of the participants. Additionally, to assess the attitude of teachers toward learning challenges, a 35-statement attitude scale was developed using a 3-point Likert Scale with options for “agree,” “neutral,” and “disagree.” This scale was carefully crafted to encompass both positive and negative statements, ensuring a comprehensive and accurate understanding of the teachers’ perspectives. The reliability of the research tools was evaluated using Cronbach’s Alpha test, which

yielded favorable results, with the awareness scale achieving a reliability score of 0.829 and the attitude scale achieving a reliability score of 0.854. Data analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), with regression analysis employed to investigate the influence of socio-demographic variables on the awareness and attitude of rural community teachers towards learning challenges.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Rural Teachers’ Socio Demographic Characteristics

The Social and demographic characteristics of the respondents, categorizing them based on age, class handling, educational qualification, years of experience, and family type. Regarding age, the respondents were grouped into four categories. The highest number of respondents (35.6%) fell within the age range of 31-40 years, with 53 participants. Regarding educational qualification, the majority of respondents (61.1%) possessed a “Degree with B.Ed,” with 91 participants. In contrast, 22.1 per cent of the sample (33 respondents) had a “Degree without B.Ed.”

Considering years of experience, respondents were divided into four categories. The highest proportion of participants (32.2%) had less than 5 years of experience, with 48 individuals. Further, the family type of the respondents was categorized as joint and nuclear. The majority (63.8%) belonged to joint families, with 95 participants, while 36.2 per cent (54 individuals) were from nuclear families. These personal factors provide important demographic insights into the study’s sample population, enabling a comprehensive understanding of the data collected.

From various studies it was evident that examining the influence of socio-demographic characteristics on teachers’ awareness and

attitude concerning learning challenges holds crucial significance. Age, for instance, emerges as a pivotal factor, with older teachers often showcasing heightened empathy derived from extensive teaching experience, while younger teachers bring fresh perspectives and enthusiasm. At the same time, higher qualifications may empower teachers to create inclusive environments, and continuous professional development enhances their teaching practices, extended teaching periods contribute to encountering diverse student

needs, fostering better awareness, and improved teaching skills. Therefore, these personal factors can inform targeted interventions and professional development, thereby improving rural teachers' abilities to address the diverse needs of students.

### Rural Community Teachers' Level of Awareness and Attitude on Learning Challenges

The level of awareness and attitude toward learning challenges among rural community teachers is depicted in Table 1.

**Table 1. Level of Awareness and Attitude of Rural Community Teachers on Learning Challenges**

Sl. No	Variables	Categories	Number	Percentage
1	Awareness	High	18	12.1
		Moderate	112	75.2
		Low	19	12.8
2	Attitude	Favourable	62	41.6
		Neutral	84	56.4
		Unfavourable	3	2
Total			149	100

Table 1 presents data on 149 rural community teachers, and their awareness and attitude concerning learning challenges. Regarding awareness, the majority, 75.2 per cent, showed a moderate level, 12.8 per cent had a low level and 12.1 per cent demonstrated a high level of awareness. Turning to attitude, 56.4 per cent held a neutral attitude, 41.6 per cent of the respondents displayed a favorable attitude towards learning challenges, and only two per cent expressed an unfavorable attitude. These findings provide valuable insights into the perceptions and inclinations of rural community teachers concerning learning challenges, which are crucial for understanding and addressing educational needs in such communities.

The alignment of this research findings with the prior studies conducted by Basim et al. (2019) in Kerala, Daniel et al. (2019) in Pune, Charan and Kaur (2017) in Punjab, and Ghimire (2017) in Dharan, Nepal, is indicative of a broader, recurring issue within the educational landscape. However, a study conducted by Shari and Vranda (2015) with 200 primary school teachers from 16 schools of Bangalore South revealed that most of the teachers had favourable attitude towards specific learning disabilities which is found to be dissimilar from the results of the present study, and this contradiction in attitudes may stem from differences in urban and rural teachers' access to resources and training, as well as potential cultural variations shaping their perceptions of specific learning challenges.

### Predictive Capacities of Socio-demographic Factors on Awareness and Attitude of Rural Teachers on Learning Challenges

A multiple linear regression analysis was carried out to investigate the relationship between respondents' social and demographic characteristics and awareness as well as attitudes towards learning challenges. The sample size of 149 was considered sufficient for the five independent variables used in the study, as the assumption of linear regression was met, which indicated that the sample was adequate. The assumption of singularity was

met, and in the correlation analysis, none of the independent variables had coefficient loadings exceeding 0.9, indicating no severe multi-collinearity. Collinearity was also satisfied, with tolerance values less than 1 and VIF less than 10, ensuring no substantial multi-collinearity among the independent variables. Extreme univariate outliers were not found, and Cook's distance was within an acceptable range, implying no single data point excessively influenced the model. These results suggest that all assumptions for conducting the multiple linear regression analysis were adequately met, establishing the reliability of the findings.

**Table 2a. Correlation between Social - Demographic Characteristics and Awareness**

Variables	Awareness	Age	Family Type	Educational Qualification	Years of Experience	Class Taught
Awareness	1.000					
Age	.211**	1.000				
Family Type	.085	.026	1.000			
Educational Qualification	.018	-.133*	-.075	1.000		
Years of Experience	.318**	.656**	-.016	-.014	1.000	
Class Taught	.136*	.211**	.031	-.280**	.266**	1.000

Table 2a displays the correlation matrix depicting the relationships between Social and demographic characteristics and awareness among the participants. The correlation between awareness and age demonstrated a positive relationship with awareness ( $r = .211$ ,  $p < .001$ ), indicating that as participants' age increased, their awareness of learning challenges also showed an increase. The positive correlation was attained based on the scoring pattern which implied higher scores as higher awareness levels and quantified age that implied higher code numbers for higher age groups. Age-

related cumulative experiences and continuous exposure to a variety of educational contexts may explain the positive link between age and awareness of learning challenges that have been reported. Older participants may have experienced a wider variety of pupils and teaching environments throughout their careers, which would have increased their understanding of different learning challenges. Furthermore, as people get older, they might participate in ongoing professional development and learn about efficient teaching techniques, which would increase their knowledge of learning challenges

even more. Years of experience also displayed a positive relationship with awareness ( $r = .318, p < .01$ ). This reveals that as the number of years of experience of the participants increased, their awareness of learning challenges also increased. In class taught, a positive relationship with awareness ( $r = .136, p < .05$ ) was noted, indicating that certain classes taught by the participants were associated with higher levels of awareness regarding learning challenges. However, the

variables family type ( $r = .085, p > .05$ ) and educational qualification ( $r = .018, p > .05$ ) did not show statistically significant correlations with awareness among the participants. The relationship observed between variations in family type and educational qualifications and the level of awareness regarding learning challenges among the study participants suggests that these factors may not have an significant effect on awareness in this context.

**Table 2b. Model Summary<sup>b</sup>**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.337 <sup>a</sup>	.114	.083	8.107	.114	3.671	5	143	.004
a. Predictors: (Constant), Class taught, Family type, Age, Educational Qualification, Years of experience									
b. Dependent Variable: Awareness									

**Table 2c. ANOVA<sup>b</sup>**

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1206.550	5	241.310	3.671	.004 <sup>a</sup>
	Residual	9398.913	143	65.727		
	Total	10605.463	148			
a. Predictors: (Constant), Class taught, Family type, Age, Educational Qualification, Years of experience						
b. Dependent Variable: Awareness						

Table 2b displays the model summary, revealing an R-value of .337, indicating a positive relationship between the independent and dependent variables. The R-squared ( $R^2$ ) value is .114, indicating an 11.4 per cent variance in the

dependent variable explained by the independent variable. On the other hand, Table 2c represents the ANOVA results, which show significant relationship between social and demographic characteristics and awareness ( $F=3.671, P=.004$ ).

Table 2d. Coefficients<sup>a</sup>

Model B		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		Std. Error	Beta			
1	(Constant)	20.256	3.733		5.426	.000
	Age	.048	.959	.005	.050	.960
	Family Type	1.609	1.387	.092	1.160	.248
	Educational Qualification	.536	.922	.049	.582	.562
	Years of Experience	2.125	.763	.299	2.785	.006
	Class Taught	1.120	1.439	.066	.778	.438
a. Dependent Variable: Awareness						

Additionally, the multiple linear regression analysis revealed that only years of experience ( $\beta=.299$ ,  $t=2.785$ ,  $P=.006$ ) significantly influence the awareness among rural community teachers regarding learning challenges. This means that a one-unit change in years of experience is associated with an increased score of 2.125 the awareness of rural teachers on learning challenges. Nonetheless, the study found that age, family type, educational qualification, and class taught did not significantly influence the awareness of learning challenges among rural teachers.

A study conducted by Malliga (2020) found that primary teachers working in Erode district had a low level of awareness regarding learning disabilities. In this context, background variables such as marital status, additional qualifications, and the location of the school did not appear to exert any influence on the awareness of learning disabilities among primary school teachers. Importantly, the research deduced that there exists a significant disparity in the awareness scores related to learning disabilities among primary school teachers based on the types of schools they teach in and their monthly income levels.

Table 3. Influence of Social and Demographic Characteristics of Rural Teachers on Attitude

Variables	Attitude	Age	Family Type	Educational Qualification	Years of Experience	Class Taught
Attitude	1.000					
Age	.137*	1.000				
Family Type	.036	.026	1.000			
Educational Qualification	-.044	-.133*	-.075	1.000		
Years of Experience	.268**	.656**	-.016	-.014	1.000	
Class Taught	.013	.211**	.031	-.280**	.266**	1.000

\*\* -Significant at 1% level

\* -Significant at 5% level

Table 3 presents the correlation matrix, examining the relationships between social and demographic characteristics with attitudes toward learning challenges among the participants. The correlation analysis revealed significant results for certain variables. Firstly, the correlation between attitude and age was positive and statistically significant ( $r = .137^*$ ,  $p < .05$ ), also years of experience also displayed a positive relationship with attitude ( $r = .268^{**}$ ,  $p < .01$ ), indicating that as participants' age increased, their attitude toward learning challenges showed a favourable level and a similar trend was observed in years of experience as well. The positive correlation was established by examining the scoring pattern, where elevated scores indicated a higher attitude level. Additionally, age codes as well as codes for years of experience were quantified, with higher code numbers corresponding to more advanced age group and experience. As teachers' age increases, they may develop a heightened sense of empathy and patience, essential qualities in dealing with learning challenges. This emotional intelligence, cultivated through years of interaction with students, might manifest as a positive attitude

toward understanding and addressing diverse learning needs. On the other hand, family type ( $r = .036$ ,  $p > .05$ ), educational qualification ( $r = -.044$ ,  $p > .05$ ) and class taught ( $r = -.013$ ,  $p > .05$ ) did not show statistically significant correlations with attitude among the participants. This implies that variations in family type, class taught and educational qualifications did not have a statistically significant impact on the level of attitude regarding learning challenges among the participants in this study. These findings suggest that, within the scope of this study, demographic aspects such as family type, the class taught, and educational qualifications may not be the primary determinants shaping teachers' attitudes toward learning challenges. It opens avenues for exploring other potential influential factors, such as, professional development opportunities, or specific training related to addressing diverse learning needs. Moreover, these results underscore the diverse and complex nature of attitudes among teachers, highlighting the need for a nuanced understanding of the factors that contribute to their perspectives on learning challenges.

**Table 3b. Model Summary<sup>b</sup>**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.291 <sup>a</sup>	.084	.052	11.246	.084	2.639	5	143	.026
a. Predictors: (Constant), Class taught, Family type, Age, Educational Qualification, Years of experience									
b. Dependent Variable: Attitude									



Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1668.634	5	333.727	2.639	.026 <sup>a</sup>
	Residual	18084.037	143	126.462		
	Total	19752.671	148			

a. Predictors: (Constant), Class taught, Family type, Age, Educational Qualification, Years of experience

b. Dependent Variable: Attitude

The model summary and ANOVA are shown in Tables 3b and 3c, respectively. According to the table, the R-value was .291, indicating a positive relationship between the independent and dependent variables, accounting for 8.4%

of the variance and an  $R^2$  of .084. According to the ANOVA, there was a significant correlation between sociodemographic factors and attitude among teachers in rural communities, with  $F=2.639, p=.026$ .

Model	B	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		Std. Error	Beta			
1	(Constant)	72.389	5.178		13.979	.000
	Age	-1.007	1.330	-.081	-.757	.450
	Family type	.975	1.924	.041	.507	.613
	Educational Qualification	-1.059	1.278	-.070	-.828	.409
	Years of experience	3.333	1.058	.343	3.150	.002
	Class taught	-1.884	1.996	-.082	-.944	.347

a. Dependent Variable: Attitude

Additionally, Table 3d's multi-linear regression analysis showed that the years of experience ( $\beta = .343, t = 3.150, P = .002$ ) was found to be the predictive factor of the attitudes of rural community teachers in the study area towards learning challenges. For one unit increase in years of experience, there will be a .343 score increase in teachers' attitude towards learning challenges. This indicated that factors like age, family type,

educational qualification, and the class taught did not influence rural teachers' attitudes toward learning challenges.

A study by Wu et al. (2022) examined the factors influencing rural teachers' innovative behaviour in Integrating Technology into Teaching (ITT) in China. They found that organizational environment, peer support, and information

literacy contributed to rural teachers' innovative behaviour in Integrating Technology into Teaching (ITT), while technostress hindered its behaviour in Integrating Technology into Teaching (ITT). They did not find any significant effects of demographic variables such as age, gender, education level, and teaching experience on rural teachers' innovative behaviour in Integrating Technology into Teaching (ITT). Another study by Bailey (2021) discussed the challenges and strategies for addressing the needs of rural students in the United States. He suggested that teachers can work with rural students' families to improve outcomes for rural students by engaging them in the learning process, communicating regularly and transparently, and providing relevant and authentic learning experiences. He did not mention any specific factors that affect rural teachers' attitudes toward learning challenges. A study by Plessis and Mestry (2019) explored the challenges and opportunities for teacher education in rural schools in South Africa. The research outcomes highlighted that the only two factors that significantly affected the inclusion of students with learning disabilities - teachers' training and age. In contrast, factors such as teachers' gender, experience, qualifications, and marital status did not exert a notable influence on the inclusion of students with learning disabilities.

Rural teachers, as defined in this study, are educators who are both working and living in rural areas. These teachers play a pivotal role in shaping the educational landscape of remote and less developed regions. Often facing unique challenges related to limited resources and geographical isolation. Rural teachers are tasked with the crucial responsibility of imparting knowledge and skills to students who come from similar limited resources as of these teachers. Socio-demographic variables, encompassing characteristics such as age, education, family

type, and years of teaching experience, form the basis for understanding the diverse composition of these rural educators. In the specific context of this study, the term "rural teachers" takes into account the intricate interplay of personal and professional factors that contribute to the socio-demographic profile of these individuals. The influence of socio-demographic variables on rural teachers is a nuanced aspect of the study. Notably, the age and number of years a teacher has spent in the profession emerged as a significant factor shaping their awareness levels and attitudes towards learning challenges. In contrast, other socio-demographic variables, including family type, educational qualification, and the class taught, did not demonstrate statistical significance in influencing these teachers' awareness and attitudes on educational obstacles. This study sheds light on the unique dynamics of rural education, emphasizing the importance of considering both the professional and personal aspects of teachers in these settings. Recognizing the specific characteristics that define rural teachers allows for a more targeted approach to address their needs and challenges, ultimately contributing to the improvement of education for the children to overcome educational obstacles in underserved areas.

## CONCLUSION

The study revealed that a substantial majority of the teachers exhibited a moderate level of awareness concerning learning challenges, with a smaller proportion displaying high awareness levels and a slightly larger fraction with low awareness. In the context of attitudes toward learning challenges, more than half of the teachers adopted a neutral stance. This indicates that a considerable number of teachers neither strongly favoured nor opposed addressing learning challenges. Meanwhile, a noteworthy percentage demonstrated a favourable attitude, showcasing receptivity and support

for addressing learning challenges. In contrast, a minimal (2%) expressed an unfavourable attitude, indicating a small fraction of teachers with a less optimistic perspective on handling learning challenges. It is essential to underscore the significance of the substantial 56.4% of teachers who maintained a neutral attitude. This neutrality suggests a middle-ground perspective that may be influenced by a variety of factors such as their thoughts, beliefs, exposure to inclusive practices, and lack of specific training towards educational policies. Importantly, the mention of a potential shift to an unfavourable stance over time implies that these teachers might be open to evolving perspectives. This shift could be influenced by gaining more experience in dealing with diverse learning challenges or encountering challenges in implementing inclusive practices, potentially leading some teachers to develop a less favourable outlook over time. These insights are pivotal in effectively informing strategies tailored to address the evolving educational needs of rural areas.

The study revealed that years of experience emerged as a significant influence for both awareness and attitude among rural community teachers. Teachers with greater experience tended to display heightened awareness and more positive attitudes towards addressing learning challenges. Conversely, social and demographic factors such as age, family structure, educational background, and the class they taught did not exert a significant influence on either awareness or attitude. These findings hold crucial implications for educational stakeholders and policymakers. It is clear that experienced teachers play a crucial role in fostering awareness and cultivating positive attitudes towards addressing learning challenges in rural areas. To leverage this, tailored support and professional development programs should be crafted, with a particular focus on empowering experienced teachers. By doing so,

we can enhance the overall quality of education in rural settings and ensure that students receive the support they need to succeed academically. Furthermore, involving rural community teachers in policymaking processes and crafting policies aligned with their insights can lead to contextually relevant and effective strategies for rural education. This collaborative approach can create an enabling environment that promotes equitable educational opportunities, empowering students in rural communities to achieve their full potential.

Practical applications of these findings might involve integrating awareness and attitude enhancement modules into teacher training programs or utilizing the insights to inform policy initiatives aimed at improving the quality of education in rural communities. Effective improvement of education in rural areas involves a multifaceted approach. Identifying specific educational challenges, targeted interventions, and subsequent teacher training programmes should address the enhancement of awareness with regard to learning challenges and a favourable attitude to address these challenges.

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