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A study of teacher attitudes in relation to teaching mathematics in secondary grades

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Due to its abstract nature, the subject mathematics is difficult for some students. The students who are able to digest the abstract concepts are considered to be the “cream” of the class. As a result of the grade five scholarship examination, the “cream” gets the chance of learning in prestigious schools. Students who remain behind in rural schools are considered by teachers to be weaker, in terms of achievement. Thus, in the teacher community, there is an attitude of “no point in being committed and dedicated to work with the remaining students”. Moreover, empirical evidence in the literature suggests that there is a very high level of correlation between, teacher attitudes and student achievement levels. The focus of the present study is to understand the nature of the teachers' attitudes, and its relationship with gender and professional qualifications. The sample consisted of 120 teachers, representing trained teachers, trained graduate teachers, and National College of Education Diploma qualified teachers selected from two educational zones. The data collection instrument was a Likert attitude scale consisting of 25 statements (12 positive and 13 negative) belonging to five themes (1. importance and nature of the subject; 2. teachers' attitudes regarding knowledge of the subject and motivation; 3. teaching methods; 4. curriculum materials and pupil text books; and 5. competency level of student and motivation). The questionnaire was pilot tested before administering to the sample. The first part had questions regarding the teachers' personal and demographic details. The sample data analysis revealed that teachers have shown 70.4% favorable attitudes. The highest percentage was observed in the theme “teachers' attitudes regarding knowledge of the subject and motivation”. There was a significant attitudinal difference according to the teachers' professional qualifications. Teachers who had passed out from the National Colleges of Education had significantly higher favourable attitudes than the trained teachers and trained graduate teachers. There was also a significant attitudinal difference according to gender. Female teachers had higher favorable attitudes than male teachers. The findings highlight the importance of pre-service training. It can be suggested that teacher recruitment should be made only after pre-service training which can be given at the National Colleges of Education. The need for reorganization of teacher's professional development curricula that could influence desirable attitudinal changes in teachers towards teaching mathematics to all students is emphasized by this study.

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