



# **A Study on Perception of Regular School Teachers towards Inclusion of Children with Mental Retardation (Intellectual Disabilities) in Regular Schools**

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# Abstract

*The aim of the study was to assess the perception of regular school teachers towards inclusion of children with mental retardation in regular schools. A total number of 100 regular school teachers from different from Chennai were selected for this study from government, government-aided and private schools through random sampling. Identification and demographic information about regular school teachers were obtained by using specially designed data sheet. Perception assessment tool had been developed by the present author was used to find out the perception of the regular school teachers towards inclusion of children with mental retardation in regular schools. Descriptive statistics like t-test and ANOVA with post-hoc analysis (LSD) were used. The study indicated that the perception of regular school teachers under different domains towards inclusion of children with mental retardation in regular schools is found below average. It is interpreted as regular school teachers are having negative perception in all the domains towards inclusion of children with mental retardation in regular schools as they are not made part of planning level which gives rise to negative perception about government schemes and policy. This study also indicated that age, education, experience, income and type of school has less impact on regular school teachers as overall their perception is negative. Further it could be concluded that, need based orientation and training programme should be provided to strengthen the teachers in terms of knowledge about disabilities and inclusive education to facilitate healthy interactions and relationships among teachers and the children with mental retardation. It is also suggested that more focus to be given on the regular school teachers in imparting the practical knowledge on handling the children with mental retardation in inclusive classrooms. Key words: Perception, Inclusion, Regular school teachers, Children with mental retardation*

**Introduction**

A society which cares for children with mental retardation is considered to be the best, as disability affects not only the individual and family but also society and the nation. Studies have shown the non- inclusion of children/persons with mental retardation in the developmental process has several implications, as stigma of disability may result in loss of income and additional cost to the persons with mental retardation, for their care givers and other family members. This also results in loss of education and social exclusion to them and their family members. Social exclusion at times leads to loss of rights with long term loss of productive potential of the persons with disability due to lack of appropriate environment and access. Persons with

mental retardation and their families due to stigma of disability often suffer extreme isolation and experience extreme degree of poverty and deprivation than non-disabled persons. The imperative need of the hour is their speedy empowerment to emphasize the importance of mainstreaming disability issues as an integral part of sustainable development. We need to recognize that children, women, and girls are often at greater risk of injury, violence or abuse.

Our constitution ensures equality, freedom, justice and dignity to all citizens of the country including persons with mental retardation without discrimination, which implies an inclusive society for all. Article 41 of our Constitution of India relating to right to work, to education and to public assistance in certain cases, states that “the State shall, within the limits of its economic capacity and development, make effective provision for securing the right to work, to education and to public assistance in cases of unemployment, old age, sickness and disabled, and in other cases of undeserved wants.”

More than half-a-century ago in 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly. In 1975, the same body adopted the Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons. Many important Conventions, Declarations and Action Plans have been either ratified, acceded to, or accepted by governments and international and national non-governmental organizations. Those which related directly to “Education for All”, particularly for children with disabilities are discussed here.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), especially Articles 23, 28, and 29; along with Articles 2, 3, 6, and 12, has been ratified by all countries in the Asia-Pacific region. It is binding on them “to promote and protect the right of children with disabilities.” This report of United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia – Pacific (UNESCAP) in 1999 on “Education for Children and Youth with Disabilities into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century” point out that while some significant progress has been made. However, there is a paucity of specific

disability-related data. The little that is available is also either unreliable or confusing, suggesting that much more remains to be done for a majority of disabled children (UNESCAP, 1999)

The World Declaration on Education for All and its Framework for Action to meet Basic Learning Needs (1990), Article 3, Clause 5, states “the learning needs of the disabled demand special attention. Steps need to be taken to provide equal access to education to every category of disabled persons as an integral part of the education system.” Nothing could be more clearly stated. The Declaration and Framework were accepted with the year 2000 as the target for completion. But today, after the deadline is over, the scenario remains disheartening.

The growth of education of persons with disabilities is a progression from segregation to integration and now to inclusion. Inclusion refers to the opportunity for persons with a disability to participate fully in all of the educational employment, consumer, recreational, community and domestic activities that typify every society (ILSMH 1994).

Inclusive education is concerned with removing all barriers to learning, and with the participation of all learners vulnerable to exclusion and marginalization. It is a strategic approach designed to facilitate learning success for all children. It addresses the common goals of decreasing and overcoming all exclusion from the human right to education, at least at the elementary level and enhancing access, participation and learning success in quality basic education for all (2000 Bulletin, UNESCO, 1998).

The success of inclusive education depends on how effectively all departments concerned in the State and local levels can be involved in the total development of the disabled child. Inclusive education is a community involved program and therefore, its quality depends upon the extent of interaction between the different functionaries of community development. The District Rehabilitation Centres, local hospitals, Braille presses, special schools, etc. are to be closely involved in the program implementation.

Ideal Inclusive education programs strongly insist on the importance of parental involvement in education. Parent- interact groups are important for augmenting the quality of inclusive education. The parental involvement not only enriches inclusion but also brings attitudinal changes about disability in the community. Though regular classroom teachers are available for providing service to children with mental retardation in any locality; the influences of children without disabilities on the educational achievement of children with disabilities and vice-versa are noteworthy (Loreman et al. 2005). In fact, the same age children are the best teachers for enabling children with disabilities to develop proper concepts (Avramidis, 2005). The child to child learning also becomes relevant in India where the size of the classroom is fairly large. Inclusive settings should tap the child-to-child learning strategy effectively to improve the achievement of all children. An ideal inclusive education concept aims at facilitating total integration of the child in the community. The upcoming inclusive education programs in India are avoiding separation of children with mental retardation from their families for the purpose of education. (Mani, 2004).

To make inclusion of children with mental retardation successful in mainstream education programme, regular school teacher's needs and perception about disability and their education in the mainstream education is an important factor (Spedding, 2005). They need special training as well as barrier free environment (physical, social, emotional, economic, information, attitudinal, cognitive and instructional) and other important facilities for successful inclusion (Smith et al. 2008). Hence, it is very essential to study the needs and perception of the regular school teachers.

Considering the above-mentioned facts about the present investigation, the researcher aims at studying the study the needs and perception of the regular school teachers towards inclusion of children with mental retardation in regular schools.

## **Objectives of the Study**

1. To study the perception of regular school teachers towards inclusion of children with mental retardation in regular schools.
2. To find out the thrust areas for development of a strategy for improvement in perception towards inclusive education for children with mental retardation.
3. To find out the focus need areas for development of a strategy for successful inclusive education of children with mental retardation.

## **Sample**

Total 100 samples were selected for this study from regular (government, government-aided, private schools of urban and rural areas) schools of Chennai district through purposive sampling with informed consent.

## **Tools**

**Demographic data sheet:** A specially designed data sheet was used to collect the information about regular school teachers.

**Perception assessment tool** had been developed by the present author was used to find out the perception of the regular school teachers towards inclusion of children with mental retardation in regular schools. The tool contains 40 items under six major domains namely general information aspects, medical aspects, educational aspects, social aspects, emotional aspects and policy aspects. The response to various statements were scored as 'yes', 'no' and 'don't know' and score was given '0' for don't know, '1' for wrong response and '2' for every correct response. The investigator used this scale for eliciting the opinions / information of

the regular school teachers in regard with their perception towards inclusion of children with mental retardation in regular schools.

### **Data gathering procedure**

Data were collected from Chennai about the perception of regular school teachers towards inclusion of children with mental retardation in regular schools. Once the informed consent was obtained from the regular school teachers, socio-demographic details were collected on specially designed data sheet. Perception assessment tool was administered on the regular school teachers in one session consisting 45 minutes. Teachers were requested to answer each statement freely without any hesitation and they have ensured the secrecy of their responds. Each and every teacher was contacted personally in the school setup. The purpose of the study was explained and they were requested to give their frank and appropriate responses. The respondents were also requested not to leave any item unanswered and incomplete.

### **Statistics**

Statistical analysis had been done by using SPSS for Windows (Version 14.0). Descriptive statistics like t-test and ANOVA with post-hoc analysis (LSD) was used as per their basic assumption to find out significant differences within the groups of regular school teachers towards inclusion in different areas, such as general information aspects, medical aspects, educational aspects, social aspects, emotional aspects and policy aspects and its relationship with their gender, age, education, experience, occupation, income and type of school.

### **Findings and Discussions**

Inclusion is an educational practice based on the premise of social justice that advocates equal access to educational opportunities for all students regardless of physical, intellectual, emotional or learning

disabilities. Inclusion involves students with disabilities learning with their peers in regular schools that adapt and change the way they work in order to meet the needs of all students. To be successful, inclusion requires the teacher's positive perception and capability to handle the students with disabilities. It is possible only with participation and contribution of major stakeholders in the process of inclusion i.e., regular school teachers, special educators and parents. Usually, they are involved in the process of inclusion without any systematic understanding of their needs and perceptions about inclusion. It is further significant to analyse their perception in context of inclusion of children with mental retardation as there are lots of issues and misunderstanding surrounding inclusion of children with mental retardation.

Perception of regular school teachers under different domains towards inclusion of children with mental retardation in regular schools is found below average. It is interpreted as regular school teachers are having negative perception in all the domains towards inclusion of children with mental retardation in regular schools. It could be explained in view of lack of training and resources. Teachers are not made part of planning at policy level which gives rise to negative perception about government schemes and policy.

Findings further indicated that there is no significant difference with respect to gender and occupation of regular school teachers with respect to their perception towards inclusion of children with mental retardation in regular schools. Teachers from both the genders have reported below average perception or negative perception. Similarly, teachers from private and government school have perceived inclusion of children with mental retardation in same way. Lack of awareness and resources is responsible for such perception. There is no significant difference in perception with respect to age of teachers towards inclusion. Teachers below 25 years of age have scored slightly better value which indicated towards average perception. There is no significant difference found in perception of teachers with respect to their education, income, experience and



type of schools towards inclusion of children with mental retardation in regular schools. It could be due to their overall perception as negative towards inclusion of children with mental retardation in regular school.

### **Implications and Strategies to enhance the inclusive practices for inclusion of children with mental retardation in regular schools.**

From this study most it is found that perception of regular school teachers under different domains towards inclusion of children with mental retardation in regular schools is found below average. It is interpreted as regular school teachers are having negative perception in all the domains towards inclusion of children with mental retardation in regular schools as they are not made part of planning level which gives rise to negative perception about government schemes and policy. This study also indicated that age, education, experience, income and type of school has less impact on regular school teachers as overall their perception is negative. Hence it is suggested that more practical oriented workshop or training programme should be organized on general information about disability condition and perception towards inclusion of children with mental retardation in regular schools. All the major stake holders i.e., teachers, special educators and parents especially regular school teachers must be given supervised practical training in dealing children with mental retardation in regular schools. Teachers should be given special training regarding managing the child with mental retardation in the classroom and other co-curricular situations.

Continuous orientation and training programme should be conducted in Chennai for the teachers to enhance their knowledge towards inclusive education of children with mental retardation. Awareness regarding the social benefits for the teachers should be incorporated in teacher training programme for teachers for the reinforcement of the teachers.

Indigenous and culture specific models of care which are acceptable to Indian teachers need to be developed to meet physical support, needs of teachers and also the financial needs of the teachers.

Service providers need to have updated information on State and Central Government benefits, legislation and the availability of services to meet this pressing need of many a teacher.

Evaluate service delivery opportunities through NGOs with increasing government partnership and ownership and support research and knowledge building in a positive and improving policy and legislative environment. Ensure provision that becomes part of government responsibility and sustain pressure to keep inclusive education part of mainstream sector process.

Keeping in view the massive endorsement of needs by the teachers, special educators and parents in the present study, there is an urgent need to review the existing predominantly child centered programme and to reorient them to meet specific needs of the child with mental retardation in the regular classroom. More practical orientation / input should be given to regular school teachers and provisions to be made for the social or other kind of rewards to motivate the government school teacher in changing their perception to accept the children with mental retardation in their classroom.

The regular school teachers should also be encouraged to undergo at least Foundation courses offered by Rehabilitation Council of India through online or distance mode for upgrading their knowledge in handling the children with mental retardation in regular schools. The government / school administration should make the provision for granting leave and promotional avenues for the teachers who undergo the training programmes in the field of disability rehabilitation and special education.

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**Table-1: Identification and demographic details of regular teachers (N=100)**

Areas		(n)	(%)
Gender	Male	28	28.0
	Female	72	72.0
Age	below 25 years	04	04.0
	25 to 40 years	46	46.0
	above 40 years	50	50.0
Education	Graduate with D.Ed/B.Ed. Spl.Ed	16	16.0
	Master with B.Ed.Spl.Ed	74	74.0
	Master with M.Ed.	10	10.0
Type of Employment	Private Job	54	54.0
	Government Job	46	46.0
Experience	less than 5 years	28	28.0
	5 to 10 years	42	42.0
	10 years and above	30	30.0
Income of Teachers	less than 15,000	22	22.0
	15,000 to 25,000	46	46.0
	above 25,000	32	32.0
Type of School	Private	20	20.0
	Govt. aided	34	34.0
	Government	46	46.0

**Table 2: Showing perceptions of teachers towards inclusion of children with mental retardation in regular school**

Domains	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
General Information	100	0.00	8.00	4.7500	2.8011
Medical Aspects	100	8.00	5.2300	2.2195	1.00
Educational Aspects	100	2.00	6.00	3.7800	1.5543
Social Aspects	100	1.00	2.00	1.8500	0.3589
Emotional Aspects	100	0.00	0.00	0.0000	0.0000
Policy Aspects	100	2.00	2.00	2.0000	0.0000
Perceptions-Total Score	100	8.00	21.00	17.6100	3.8479

Overall Perception score % =  $\text{Mean}/\text{Max.Score} \times 100 = 17.6/40 \times 100 = 44.0\%$  (below average)

**Table 3: Showing perceptions of teachers with respect to their gender and type of occupation towards inclusion of children with mental retardation in regular school**

Variables		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	't'- value
Gender	Male	28	17.3929	3.7152	0.35
	Female	72	17.6944	3.9205	
	Private Job	54	17.7037	3.6633	

Occupation 0.27 Government Job 46 17.5000 4.0920

NS –  $p > 0.05$ , Not Significant

**Table 4: Showing perceptions of teachers with respect to their age towards inclusion of children with mental retardation in regular school**

Age	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
below 25 years	4	18.2500	2.0616	1.0308
25 to 40 years	46	17.7391	4.2081	0.6205
above 40 years	50	17.4400	3.6487	0.5160
Total	100	17.6100	3.8479	0.3848

#### ANOVA

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	3.850	2	1.925	.128	$p > 0.05$
Within Groups	1461.940	97	15.072		
Total	1465.790	99			

$p > 0.05$   
– Not Significant

**Table 5: Showing perceptions of teachers with respect to their qualifications towards inclusion of children with mental retardation in regular school**

Education	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
Graduate with D.Ed/B.Ed	16	16.0625	5.0789	1.2697
Master with B.Ed.	74	18.0676	3.3077	0.3845
Master with M.Ed.	10	16.7000	4.9227	1.5567
Total	100	17.6100	3.8479	0.3848

#### ANOVA

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	62.090	2	31.045	2.145	$p > 0.05$
Within Groups	1403.700	97	14.471		
Total	1465.790	99			

$p > 0.05$  – Not Significant

**Table 6: Showing perceptions of teachers with respect to their income towards inclusion of children with mental retardation in regular school**

Income	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
less than Rs.15,000	22	17.1818	4.2160	0.8989
Rs.15,000 to 25,000	46	17.5000	3.8108	0.5619
above Rs.25,000	32	18.0625	3.7152	0.6568
Total	100	17.6100	3.8479	0.3848

  

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	11.142	2	5.571	.371	$p > 0.05$
Within Groups	1454.648	97	14.996		
Total	1465.790	99			

$p > 0.05$  – Not Significant

**Table 7: Showing perceptions of teachers with respect to their experience towards inclusion of children with mental retardation in regular school**

Experience	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
less than 5 years	28	16.7857	4.0675	0.7687
5 to 10 years	42	17.8333	4.0720	0.6283
10 years and above	30	18.0667	3.2793	0.5987
Total	100	17.6100	3.8479	0.3848

**ANOVA**

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	27.376	2	13.688	.923	$p > 0.05$
Within Groups	1438.414	97	14.829		
Total	1465.790	99			

$p > 0.05$   
– Not Significant

**Table 8: Showing perceptions of teachers with respect to type of school towards inclusion of children with mental retardation in regular school**

Type of School	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
Private	20	17.4500	3.7902	0.8475
Govt. aided	34	17.7941	3.6662	0.6288
Government	46	17.5435	4.0754	0.6009
Total	100	17.6100	3.8479	0.3848

#### ANOVA

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1.868	2	.934	.062	p>0.05
Within Groups	1463.922	97	15.092		
Total	1465.790	99			

*p>0.05 – Not Significant*

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