

# Inclusive Education: Need for Enhancing Special Education Skills among Regular School Teachers

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## ABSTRACT

The present study attempted to find out the current skill levels of teachers to teach children with special needs (CWSN) in inclusive education settings. A total of 92 school teachers were participated in this study and the data collected by using a two-part questionnaire. Part-one of the questionnaire collected background information of the respondents. Part-two was a five point scale which required the teachers to indicate their preparedness in special education skill levels on a list of competencies needed to inclusive classrooms. Data was analyzed using descriptive and differential statistics. The major findings were that nearly 75% of the regular school teachers had inadequate special education skills. Further, 47% of the teachers did attend proper in-service programme related to special education. Finally, 69% teachers with special education qualification rated themselves as having low competence for working CWSN. Providing Systematic in-service training to the teachers can improve quality of inclusive education.

**Keywords:** *Special education skills, inclusive education, in-service training*

## INTRODUCTION

Since from independence days of India, a number of education policies and commissions have been set up to provide education for all children irrespective of their diversity. The National Education Policy 1968, New Education Policy 1986 and RTE Act 2009 were the important policies had helped to increase enrolment of children to schools. But there has been a

big challenge in mainstreaming the Children with special needs (CWSN) in educational system in India. As per UDISE 2021-22, the Children with Special Needs (CWSN) enrolment is 0.89% of total enrolment of children and the enrolment rate of CWSN is showing an improvement of 3.45% over 2020-21. A 2019 UNESCO report states that of the 78.64 lakh disabled children, three-fourths of them aged five years do not attend school in India. Even though various efforts like inclusive education programs and Samagra Shiksha (2018) have been implemented in the recent past, enrolment of children with special needs in regular schools is not that much improved. Discrimination from the school authorities, teachers, and peers are the main reasons for parents to stay away from inclusive schools. A lack of skilled teachers in inclusive schools further precipitates the problem. In this context the investigator attempted to examine the current special education skill level of teachers serving in inclusive schools.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The educational provision for students with disabilities in India has undergone a remarkable change in the last 30years. In alignment with the global movement, the focus of meeting their educational and social needs has shifted from exclusive to inclusive education. But, there are different factors essential to realize the Inclusive education for children with special needs. The key factors in inclusive education are teachers, schools and administrators, parents

of children with special needs and last but not least the local community. Adequate academic as well as administrative support is also needed for the success of inclusion of children with disabilities in general schools. Simply enrolment of these children will not serve the purpose of inclusion (Raj Lakshmi, 2018). Regular school teacher's roles and responsibilities in inclusive education is paramount important. Children with special needs in inclusive education have high hopes and aspirations as their counterparts do in classrooms. The literature on inclusive education indicates that effective inclusion does not take place until regular classroom teachers deliver relevant and meaningful instruction to students with disabilities (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2010). According to the data provided by the United Nations Children's Fund (2013) had indicated that a notable number of teachers globally have not received training for inclusivity in classrooms during their teacher-training programs. Skilled classroom teacher is the single most important factor in the success of inclusive education programs and the regular school teachers to upgrade their skills to cater the needs of all children in classroom. Academic inclusion is largely dependent on teacher training, attitude, and reporting of children with special education needs, as well as the instructional tactics employed (Mag, Sinfield and Burns, 2017). The adaptive abilities of classroom teachers are one of the primary turning points in achieving an inclusive school environment. To function in an inclusive classroom, teachers must understand individual difference, teaching strategies, and personal qualities in order to provide a stimulating learning environment (Bukvić, 2014). Apart from equipping teachers with skills, knowledge, and understanding, one of the most difficult aspects of teachers' preparation for inclusive practice is ensuring the development of favourable attitudes toward children with disabilities and their inclusion in regular classes (Forlin, 2010). Sharma, Moore and Sonawane (2009)

conducted study and found that relatively unfavourable opinions and moderate worry about the inclusion of students with impairments. Students with Special needs in inclusive programme not only need the teachers with right attitudes but also with appropriate special education competencies that will help them realize their dreams.

#### **Title of the Problem**

“Inclusive Education: Need for Enhancing Special Education Skills among Regular School Teachers”

#### **Objectives of the study**

- To examine the current skill level of teachers in teaching of children with special needs in inclusive education schools.
- To study the significant difference if any in the teachers' special education competencies with regards to their gender, age, educational background, teaching experience and number of in-service attended.

#### **Hypotheses**

Ho1: Teacher's skills on special education are not equal to average level.

Ho2: There is no significant difference in the teachers' special education skills with regards to their gender difference.

Ho3: There is no significant difference among age group with respect to the teachers' special education Skills

Ho4: There is no significant difference among different levels of general teacher education qualification with respect to the teachers' special education Skills.

Ho5: There is no significant difference among different levels of special education qualification with respect to the teachers' special education Skills

Ho6: There is no significant difference among general school experience levels with respect to teachers' special education Skills

Ho7: There is no significant difference among different levels of experience in dealing CWSN with respect to the teachers' special education Skills

## **METHODOLOGY**

Descriptive survey method was followed in this study. The main goal of this study is to examine the current skill level of school teachers in order to teach CWSN in inclusive settings. The study also like to find out the role of gender difference, Age, educational backgrounds and teaching experience on their current level of inclusive education skills.

### **Sample**

Snowball sampling technique was followed to collect data from different states of India (Tamilnadu, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and New Delhi). Teachers were contacted through email and requested to fill the Google form developed for this study. In the first stage, the special education departments and education department of state and National were contacted and collected their alumni members contact details. From their list the teachers of inclusive schools were selected for collecting data. Therefore 92 teachers of inclusive education settings were willing to participate in this study.

### **Tool used**

The investigator developed rating scale in Google form based on teacher's skill required to deal children with special needs in inclusive education programme. There were two components of the tool that participants completed. The demographic and background information were collected in the first portion of the questionnaire. The researcher gathered demographic data by conducting a quick survey to obtain the following information: gender, age, qualification in teacher education, qualification in special education, years of teaching experience in normal school, teaching experience with special need children; and number of in-service attended in special education field. The instrument's second part was a scale that gathered teachers' level of difficulty regarding inclusive education programme. Participants then responded to 44 items on a five point scale. The scale asked participants to indicate how much they feel difficulty with

the statement by selecting one of five options: Very Difficult (VD), Difficult (D), Neither Difficult nor Easy (NDNE), Easy (E), and Very Easy (VE). The tool used in the study had split-half reliability coefficient of 0.83. Initially 63 items related to inclusive education were kept the tool and sent for expert's feedback from NIEPMD, Special education faculty of central and state universities. According to expert's feedback, 19 items were dropped at final tool preparation. The six competency categories were included in the tool on the basis of input provided by special education experts. To acquire more insight, survey tool was pre-tested on a small group of teachers prior to its administration to the sample selected for the study. The data collected through Google form was analysed by applying descriptive and differential statistics.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Analysis indicated that 75% (26.1% low level and 48.9 moderate level)) teachers had not acquired skill to cater the needs of CWSN in inclusive setting. 33% of the teachers had attended one training program and 14% of the teachers had not received any training in special education. The previous study conducted earlier (Ajay Kumar Das 2013) found that nearly seventy percent of the regular school teachers in Delhi had neither received any training in special education nor had experience teaching students with disabilities. Professional development program planners in India also need to consider 'bottom up' strategy rather than a 'top down' process for the determination of training program content and format. Further, 36% indicated that they did not have any experience working with special needs children.

The following table- 1 shows the competencies of teachers to deal CWSN in inclusive education setting. To find the competencies of Teachers are equal to average level, the investigator applied one sample t-test and the results are discussed under the table- 1.

**Table – 1 Mean Standard Deviation and t-value of Teacher’s Skill to deal Children with special needs**

Skills	Test Value	Mean	SD	t -value	P –value
Skill in Visual Impairment (VI)	24	20.96	6.06	4.81	<0.001**
Skill in Hearing Impairment (HI)	30	29.00	6.68	1.44	0.155
Skill in Intellectual Impairment (II)	12	11.64	3.35	1.03	0.308
Skill in Learning Disabilities (LD)	9	8.59	2.52	1.5	0.119
Core Skill in Inclusive Education	39	38.41	9.28	0.61	0.543

Note: \*\* denotes significant at 1% level

The calculated t-values and P- value for all the five competency areas are presented in the table- 1. Since P values for all the competency areas are more than the 0.001 except visual impairment, the formulated null hypothesis “Teacher’s skills on special education are not equal to average level” is rejected with regard to all the factors on competencies towards handling children with various types of Impairment except visual impairment. Hence the teachers of general schools acquired average level competencies towards handling children with various types of Impairment. Based on the mean score, competencies of the general school teacher regarding to deal children with visually impairment, is below average level.

The second null hypotheses are based on the gender, age, teacher education qualification, special education qualification and teaching experience in children with special needs to find out the gender difference of in the skills of teachers, the investigator applied t-

test and the results are presented in the following tables-2.

**Table – 2. Calculated t- value for significant difference in skills of teachers between Male and Female with respect to deal children with special needs**

Gender				t -value	P –value
Male (N=67)		Female (N=25)			
Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
125.88	26.505	125.88	26.191	0.000	0.788

It is obvious that the t- values of the above presented tables- 2 are 0.00 and it is not significant at 5% level. Hence the formulated null hypothesis “There is no significant difference in the teachers’ special education skills with regards to their gender difference” is accepted. From this it is concluded that female teachers and male teachers have equal level of skills to deal children with special needs in the inclusive schools.

To find out the influence of teachers’ skill with regards to their age, educational background and teaching experience F- test was applied and the result is presented in the following table 3.

**Table 3. Influence of background variables on Teacher’s skill to deal CWSN**

Background variables		Mean	SD	F-value	P value
Age in years	21-30	126.32	18.194	0.132	0.940
	31-40	125.12	31.772		
	41-50	127.41	25.320		
	51-60	122.65	31.698		
General Education Qualification	D.T.Ed	128.17	18.678	0.106	0.980
	B.Ed	125.41	32.413		
	M.Ed	123.67	28.353		
	M.Phil	127.00	22.758		
	Ph.D	121.50	25.579		
Special Education Qualification	Diploma	132.66	24.833	0.942	0.424
	B.Ed	123.09	28.229		
	M.Ed	121.91	39.619		
	none	122.83	19.254		
Teaching Experience in schools	1-5 years	122.86	22.945	0.407	0.667
	6-10 years	123.92	29.562		
	11 more	128.14	27.491		
Teaching Experience with CWSN	1-5 years	121.24	26.996	0.862	0.426
	5 and more	129.44	31.828		
	none	127.97	20.366		

The stated null hypothesis 3,4,5,6 and 7 were tested by applying the F-test and the calculated values are not significant at 0.05 level. Hence, above mentioned hypotheses were accepted and the variables such as age, educational qualifications and teaching experiences were not influenced various skills to deal children with special needs in inclusive education setting.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, while the results of this study provide useful insights into teachers' current skills to deal children with special needs in inclusive education schools, this study also strongly indicate the importance of providing in-service training to all teachers in inclusive settings. Future research would need to consider conducting reason for the teachers not acquiring skills in special education through personal or focus group interviews and classroom observations. Responses from other stakeholders including administrators, teacher educators, special education teachers and parents of students with disabilities would also be helpful in enhancing the quality of inclusive education and validating the responses obtained from the school teachers. Factors such as teacher's attitude, class facilities, parent's involvement, workload, diversity nature of the children and government involvement may also have an effect on teacher's skill acquirement for inclusive education.

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