

Including all: Perceptions of mainstream teachers on inclusive education in the Western Province of Sri Lanka

Shyamani Hettiarachchi^{1,2}, Ajay Das³, Mahishi Ranaweera⁴, Lasanthi Daskon-Attanayake⁵
& Dilini Walisundara⁶

¹Department of Disability Studies, Faculty of Medicine, University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka

²School of Psychology and Speech Pathology, Faculty of Health Sciences, Curtin University, Australia

³Department of Adolescent, Career and Special Education, Murray State University, USA

⁴English Language Teaching Unit, University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka

⁵Wheels-in-Motion, Sri Lanka

⁶Department of English, Sri Jayawardenapura University, Sri Lanka

The changes made to the local constitution (Parliament of Sri Lanka, 1997), the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN, 2005) in 2016 and the first World Report on Disability (WHO, 2011) support a new era for the education of children with disabilities in Sri Lanka. The emphasis of this legislation is the inclusion and full participation of students with disabilities in regular schools. It guarantees non-discrimination and removal of barriers, both physical and psychological or attitudinal; to facilitate the inclusion of students with disabilities into regular schools. It urges policy makers, educators, parents and other service providers to consider the premise that special education should be seen not in the context of separate education but as an integral part of regular education. Arguably, the success of implementing a policy of inclusive education requires mainstream school teachers to understand, accept and be competent at supporting students with disabilities within the mainstream classroom context. To uncover perceptions of 'inclusive education' among mainstream teachers. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 mainstream teachers from the Western Province using a topic guide. Thematic coding of the interview data was undertaken using the key principles of *Framework Analysis* (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994). The main themes to emerge were of incongruous conceptual understandings, fear of incompetence, limited training facilities and the lack of incentives. These findings will be discussed with regard to its implications for policy and practice. The results underpin the need to consider local teacher perceptions and to address these concerns within pre-service and in-service training in order to support the establishment of education reforms, which are relevant and sensitive to the cultural needs and cognizant of local realities.

Keywords: Inclusion, Education, Teachers, Perceptions, Sri Lanka