



Perceptions of ‘inclusion’ and perceived preparedness among school teachers in Sri Lanka



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H I G H L I G H T S

- Teachers in inclusive schools did not consider themselves competent.
- Significant differences in all competencies between two groups of teachers.
- Significant differences in teacher competencies by background variables.
- Lack of training and resources emerged as major concerns.

A R T I C L E I N F O

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This study examined the preparedness of regular and special education teachers in Sri Lanka to teach students with disabilities in an inclusive educational setting. It also explored their perceptions of the term ‘inclusion’ and its applicability to the Sri Lankan context. A total of 75 teachers were surveyed using a two-part questionnaire. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight teachers. The interview data was analyzed using Framework Analysis and the quantitative survey data was analyzed using descriptive statistics. Special education teachers indicated higher perceived competence in working with students with special needs compared to general education teachers. Implications for teacher preparation via pre-service and in-service training are discussed.

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1. Introduction

The paradigm shift in special education from ‘segregated instruction’ to ‘mainstreaming’, ‘integrated education’ and ‘inclusive education’ has been part of the discourse of professionals in education worldwide in the last three decades. Inclusive education, however, remains a much debated, often contentious and complex issue particularly in resource-poor countries. Much of this contention stems from a lack of clarity on its conceptualization and implementation. While inclusive education in the West is seen as a fundamental right of every child with special needs¹ (for example,

Least Restrictive Environment provision in the American legislation stipulated within the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act), the same rigor is not available in legislation and policies in many developing nations, including Sri Lanka.

Inclusion, however, seeks to address the learning needs of all children, young people and adults, with a specific focus on those who are vulnerable to marginalization and exclusion (Rieser, 2008). Inclusive education proposes a move away from segregated teaching and learning contexts to the inclusion of students with special educational needs within the general education classroom. It is “distinguished by an acceptance of differences between students as an ordinary aspect of human development” (Florian & Kershner, 2009, p. 173).

In this paper, ‘inclusive education’ is defined as ‘the integration and education of most students with disabilities in general education classes’ (Eleweke & Rodda, 2002). Inclusive education offers a child with special educational needs the right to enroll in his/her

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¹ The terms ‘special needs’ and ‘disabilities’ will be used interchangeably to refer to a child who requires additional support in school.