

## **How Distant is ‘Inclusion’?: A Study of Delhi School Teachers**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This research paper is based on the study of perceptions of school teachers undertaken as a research project\*. The study explored teachers’ perception about the children with special needs and as the representation of such children in their respective schools. Also, the perception of teachers regarding inclusive spaces, practices and provisions found in their respective schools were studied. In this process, the teachers’ attitudes towards as well as preparedness for inclusion in schools were analyzed. In the light of teachers’ responses, the paper makes an attempt to present the reflections of extent of preparedness and inclusive practices in schools in the present times.*

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### **Introduction**

All children, including Children with Special Needs (CWSN), do have education as a legal right since the enactment of *The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act* (RTE 2009) in India that specifies the various modalities for implementing it for every child. The overall aim of education is to enable all children, in accordance with their abilities, to live full and independent lives so that they can contribute to their communities, cooperate with other people and continue to learn throughout their lives. The legal mandate in the form of RTE Act, 2009 resulted in the recognition of the rights of CWSN including the right to be educated in ‘regular’ schools. As stated by Bhattacharya (2010), “a careful deliberation of

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the RTE provides a legal framework for implementing an inclusive educational environment for children with disability” (p. 23). This has given an explicit space to the CWSN in the Act which is in consonance with India being a signatory of the UNESCO Salamanca Statement (1994). The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (UNESCO, 1994) played a crucial role as it focused on the children with special educational needs but within the wider agenda of *Education for all* (EFA) on the premises that education should be seen as a human right which is fundamental in achieving other essential rights. It further emphasized that all children should be educated within an inclusive education system. Also, reminding of several other United Nations policies that have voiced the idea of inclusion and reiterated that the rights of all children to be valued equally, treated with respect and children to be provided with equal opportunities within the general system of education. These include the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), the UN Standard Rules for the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (1993) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD, 2006) in which the Article 24 (2) specifies that the state shall ensure access to inclusive education stating, “Persons with disabilities can access an inclusive, quality and free primary education and secondary education on an equal basis with others in the communities in which they live”. It also refers to the support that is required by the persons with disabilities to be provided within the general system of education, thus indicating that provisioning was an important aspect of inclusive education.

In the Indian context, the philosophy of inclusion has its reflection in many ways in various Acts/Schemes and rights in relation to education that included children with disabilities at par with the other children. Since the 1970s, various schemes of the Government of India, especially those concerned with Universalization of Elementary Education (UEE) have been advocated for the inclusion of children with disabilities (CwD) into the mainstream educational system. These schemes include the Integrated Education for Disabled Children Scheme, 1974; the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP), 1994; the National Policy on Education, 1986; the Project Integrated Education for the Disabled, 1987; the Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995; the National Trust for the Welfare of Persons with Autism, Cerebral Retardation

and Multiple Disability, 1999; the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA, 2000); the 86<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution in 2002 that made education a fundamental right for those in the 6-14 age group; the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act 2009; and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPWD) Act, 2016 that is the revised Persons with Disabilities (PWD) Act, 1995. The RPWD Act (2016) in its chapter 1, point 2(m) defines inclusive education as, *"inclusive education means a system of education wherein students with and without disability learn together and the system of teaching and learning is suitably adapted to meet the learning needs of different types of students with disabilities"* (p. 3).

In the light of above, it can be said that the various policies and initiatives at the national and international levels have advocated for the inclusion of children with special needs in the regular schools. Also, the idea of inclusion as can be understood from various policies and initiatives emphasizes the shift of onus of education of all children onto the state; that is, to its institutions or the schools. Another significant understanding about inclusion common amongst these initiatives is that it means making provision for a barrier free and non-discriminatory environment for all children and at the same time ensuring their full participation in education. It is implicit that this requires a humongous preparation on the part of the schools in terms of creating environment, developing curricular practices and providing resources that are universal in nature for implementing inclusion in its true spirit.

While claiming that RTE Act can work for inclusion of children with disabilities Bhattacharya (2010), proposed six inclusive practices that are workable and are covered within the various sections of the Act. These are: (a) accessibility of physical space as well as social, communicative, attitudinal and educational accessibility; (b) curriculum; (c) services and training including special training for children with disability (who are beginning the education late or returning back to school system) and teacher training for encouraging inclusive practices that are learner centered; (d) assessment and evaluation specifying the duty of the teacher to assess the learning ability of each child for supplementing additional instructions and ensuring comprehensive and continuous evaluation; (e) preventing the use and abuse of disablist language; and (f) the 'others' which includes issues such as employment of PWD in schools and transfer of knowledge across disabilities and institutions. This operationalises

the RTE act by offering a framework emerging from it for making inclusion implementable in the context of schools. In the context of India, Singal (2014) gave a framework of 3E's that is based on the premises that the inclusive education for all children irrespective of their disability should be encouraged and empowered, apart from offering a mere access to such children. She proposes three dimensions to inclusion: (a) entry that is an access to a barrier free and safe living environment; (b) engagement that is offering curriculum which is culturally relevant along with teachers trained to meaningfully transact it using locally available materials and (c) empowerment that is it should foster agency so that individuals are able to convert available rights, resources and opportunities for becoming independent in making choices and decisions (p.204).

It is evident from the above discussion that inclusion is not only about providing physical space to the children with disability but to offering them a conducive, safe environment, involving them in meaningful educational experiences along with provisioning of special instructions/resources as per their need and preparing as well as expecting from them as we do from other children. In this process the teachers play a key role not only in planning learning experiences for them using the available resources but also by creating an environment that positions children with disability at par with other children. However, it is a fact that the teachers are already operating in environments that have discursive contexts primarily dominated by the medical perspective of disability that perceives the children with special needs being less powerful/capable than other children in school (Collins, 2003; Reid and Valle, 2004). Also, the teachers have their own perceptions about children with disabilities that have been formed by their previous experiences by being a member of the society or any of its institutions. Their perceptions and beliefs strongly influence their day to day practices, their language as well as teaching. The teachers can challenge the dominant discourse of medical model (Kang, 2009) and work towards a socio-cultural perspective that values children with disability for their differences/variations as diversity within the human community (Stiker, 1999). This requires that teachers are informed by the socio-cultural perspective of disability and are prepared to create accepting contexts that values their strengths (Kang, 2009). They need to be supported with the other resources and materials that they may require for organizing inclusive practices in their schools. Therefore, teachers'

perceptions about inclusion as well as its various dimensions as operating in schools are important for understanding the place of children with special needs.

Delhi, being the capital city of India, any new Policy or Act is expected to have major influence on the schools located in the city. The teachers being major stakeholders in the school system inevitably become a part of any change expected therein. Teachers are closely engaged with the children on a regular basis and children spend most of the time in school with their teachers. Hence, Delhi teachers' perception about the inclusion of CWSN in their respective schools was studied to understand teachers' ideas about the issue. Also, teachers' ideas about various dimensions of inclusion discussed above were studied.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The research was undertaken with the following objectives:

- To study the teacher's perception of representation of children with special needs in their schools and provisioning for children with special needs in their schools.
- To examine the teachers' experiences with CWSN in their schools and the challenges perceived by them in this regard.

### **Method**

The present study is part of a research project that involved a constant engagement with a group of 15 primary teachers belonging to different schools of Delhi. Around 25 teachers were randomly approached, out of which 15 gave consent to participate in the study as it required a continuous involvement. Out of 15 teachers, 10 belonged to various government schools including MCD and Sarvodaya Vidyalaya whereas 5 were from private schools. The questionnaire was developed for collecting data for understanding teachers' perceptions of representation of CWSN in their respective schools and their needs. It involved majorly descriptive questions based on vital issues and concerns related to inclusion in schools such as presence of CWSN in schools and categories generally present; identification, engagement and provisioning for CWSN and regular teachers' experience with CWSN. The data were collected by organising an interaction with the teachers where they were oriented towards the purpose of the research followed by filling up of the questionnaires by them. The analysis of questionnaire

required further clarification on teachers' responses. Hence, this was followed by interacting with the teachers individually to probe their responses further.

## Results

The responses of teachers gathered through questionnaire and during interactions with the teachers were analysed qualitatively using open coding. In this process, the responses were categorised into various themes that emerged during the analysis of the data. Some themes required another level of categorisation for which subthemes were created for a detailed and comprehensive analysis as well as interpretation of the data. The responses under each theme and subtheme were grouped into specific categories and their respective scores were calculated representing the frequency of their occurrence in the data to some extent. The theme-wise analysis is presented below.

### Theme 1: Teachers' understanding of Children with Special Needs

#### *Teachers' Awareness about the Diversity Existing amongst CWSN*

Figure 1 shows that the highest number of categories known to a teacher was as high as 12 and least number of categories known to a teacher was 4. This implies that most teachers were aware of the categories found amongst the CWSN, with varying number. This indicated that teachers were aware of the diversity existing amongst the children with special needs.

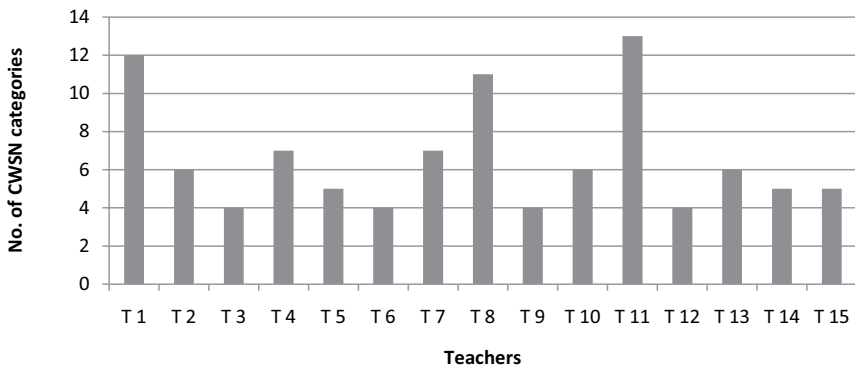


Figure 1. Awareness amongst teachers about number of CWSN categories

### ***Teachers' Awareness about Presence of CWSN in Schools***

Table 1 shows that most of the teachers were aware about the presence of learning disability, physical handicap, hearing impairment and visual impairment. This implies that children with above mentioned disabilities might be present in most of the schools.

**Table 1**  
**Categories of CWSN as reported by Teachers**

<b>S. N.</b>	<b>Name of the Category</b>	<b>Frequency (Number of Teachers)</b>
1.	Learning Disability	15
2.	Learning difficulty	1
3.	Gifted Students	4
4.	Cognitive Impairment	8
5.	Developmental Delay	2
6.	AD and ADHD	6
7.	Physically Handicapped	12
8.	Hearing Impairment	9
9.	Visual Impairment	9
10.	Down Syndrome	1
11.	Creative	1
12.	Children with behavioural needs	1
13.	Children with organizational needs	1
14.	Children belonging to EWS Category	2
15.	Children from poor education background	1
16.	Children with different understanding ability	1
17.	Autism	6
18.	Speech Impairment	4
19.	Children with emotional needs	2
20.	Cerebral Palsy	1
21.	Brain Injury	2
22.	Muscular Dystrophy	1
23.	Sensory Disabilities	1
24.	Slow Learners	3
25.	Multiple Disabilities	1
26.	Neural Disorder	1

As gathered from the responses of teachers, children with learning disability, learning difficulty, physical impairment and visual impairment were present in most of the schools (Table 2). Out of 15 classes about which the teachers responded, six classes had children with learning disability, six had children with visual impairment (including children with low vision) and five had children with physical impairment. These responses correspond with the responses of question which intended to study the category to which most of the CWSN belonged that were present in schools generally. Results to this question show that the presence of children with learning disability and visual impairment was more in schools of Delhi as compared to other children with special needs.

**Table 2**  
**Categories of CWSN Present in Each School**

Teacher	Number of categories present in classroom	Name of categories	Children in each category
T 1	6	Developmental delay	1
		Learning Disability	2
		Learning Difficulty	1
		Socially Gifted	4
		Attention Deficit	2
		Visual Impairment	2
T 2	4	Learning Disability	10-12
		Gifted	1
		ADHD	4
		EWS	3-4
T 3	3	EWS children	10
		Different abilities	10-15
		Visual impairment	2-3
		Hearing impairment	2-3
T 4	Not answered		
T 5	3	Developmental delay	2
		Speech impairment	1
		Cognitive impairment	2
T 6	3	Visual impairment	1
		Physical impairment	2-5
		Cognitive impairment	2



T 7	3	Emotional needs Speech impairment Learning disability	2 1 4
T 8	1	Visual impairment	1
T 9	1	Learning disability	1
T 10	1	Learning difficulty	2-3
T 11	3	Orthopaedic impairment Speech impairment Learning disability	1 1 3-4
T 12	4	Socially gifted Physical impairment Learning disability Cognitive impairment	3 1 7-9 2
T 13	1	Low vision	1
T 14	1	Low vision	1
T 15	1	Cognitive impairment	1

**Theme 2: Teachers’ Classroom Experiences with Children with Special Needs (CWSN)**

***Procedure Followed for the Identification of CWSN***

Most schools used observations and tests for identification of CWSN (Figure 2). The teachers also acknowledged the role of their own observations as well as the role of parents, and child’s participation in different activities, etc. for identification of CWSN.

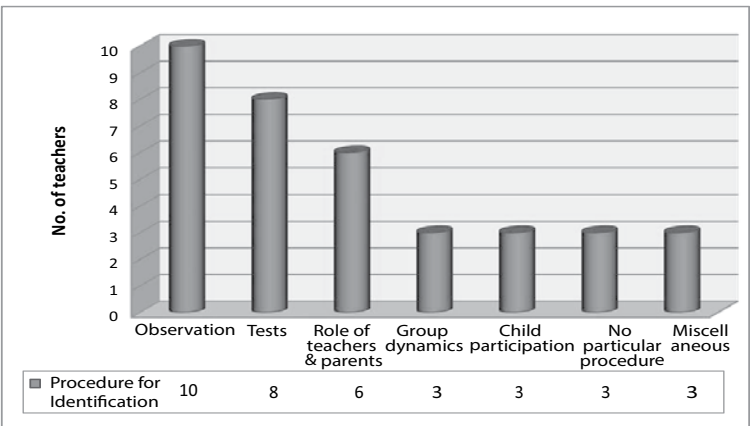


Figure 2. Procedures used for identification of CWSN

### **Criteria Used by Teachers for Identification of CWSN**

Figure 3 shows that most of the teachers used behavior of the child in the class as well as their learning styles or patterns as the criteria for identification of the children with special needs, though few have also mentioned assessment by the special educator as one of the criteria. Very few have also acknowledged children's behavior outside the classroom and their participation as criteria for their identification. This indicates that the teachers depend more on their classroom observations for identification of CWSN.

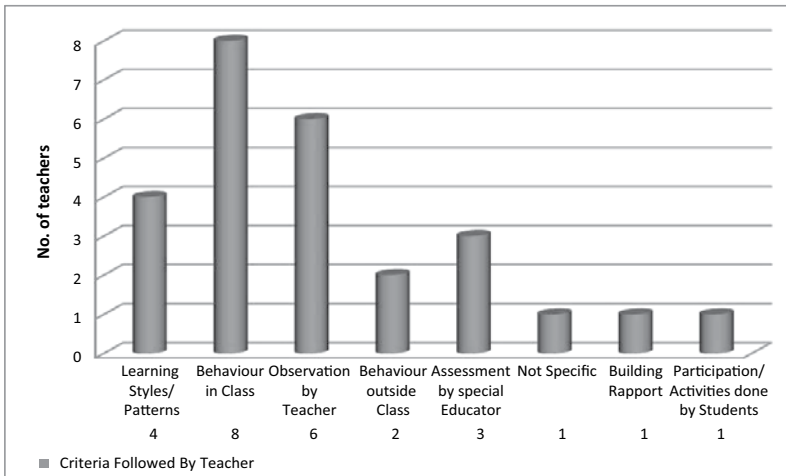


Figure 3. Criteria followed by teachers for identification of CWSN

### **Engaging CWSN in the Class**

When asked about the modality of engaging CWSN in the class, majority of teachers (73.3%) responded that they help them to develop at their own pace (Figure 4). This includes providing individual attention and extra time in the classes. About 13.30 per cent teachers reported that they catered to their needs by providing them support. Similar percentage was seen in next category 'assistance by special educator', which shows that about 13.30 per cent teachers took help from special educators for designing appropriate task for them. About 40 per cent teachers also emphasized the importance of classroom adaptations for children with special needs. Some of the examples of classroom adaptations quoted by teachers included providing front seats to students with low vision, reading the text written on black board and arranging hands on activities.

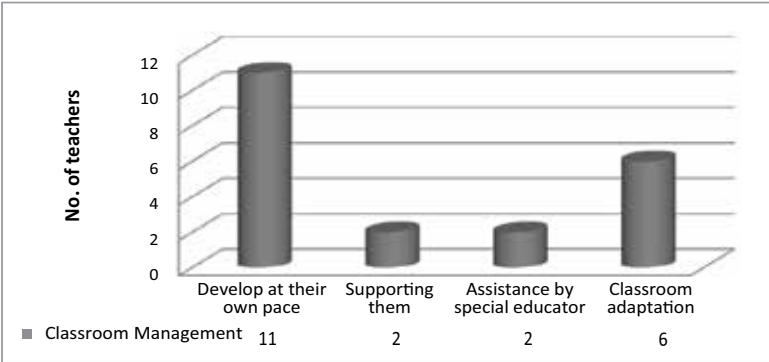


Figure 4. Engaging CWSN in Class

**Theme 3: Challenges Faced by the Teachers**

The large classroom strength and work load were considered major challenges by the teachers in managing children with special needs (Figure 5). About 80 per cent teachers highlighted that due to huge classroom strength they failed to provide individual attention to children with special needs and thus their needs mostly went unattended. Two government teachers mentioned that in their schools the class strength exceeded to 60 which made it impossible for them to look into the individual needs of students. Behavioural issues such as securing and maintaining their attention, adjustment with the class and behavioral outburst because of the family problems were reported by about 40 per cent teachers. Lack of training (26.6%), infrastructural issues (13.3%), and lack of parental support (6%) were also reported.

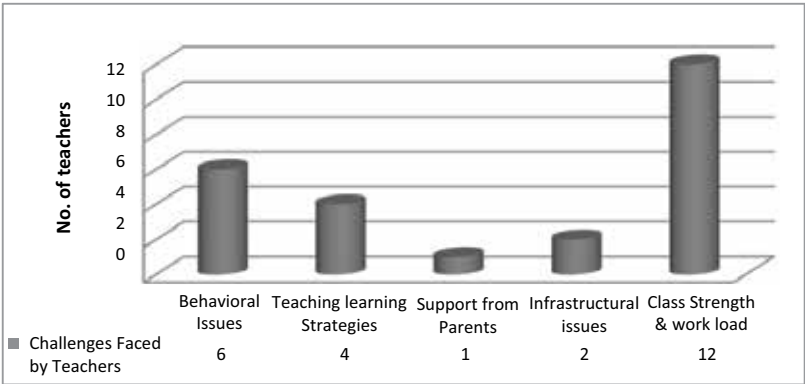


Figure 5. Challenges faced by the teachers

#### **Theme 4: Aids/Provisioning for CWSN in schools**

##### ***Aids/Provisioning for CWSN provided by the government or other higher authorities***

Figure 6 shows that some of the teachers i.e. 33.3% teachers perceived that the government and other school higher authorities have provided an inclusive infrastructure for schools and classrooms which is a favourable facility for children with special needs. The teachers responded that ramps in school, toilets for special needs children and other audio-visual aids made things convenient for some percentage of children. 13.3% teachers shared that the appointment of special educator and school counselor helped them understand children with special needs and devise activities for them. The special educators also helped in assessments which helped them interpret their special needs. Similar percentage of teachers responded that the in-service programs arranged by government or higher authorities helped them gain knowledge about various disabilities and other childhood problems and issues which assisted them in managing their classrooms. 20% teachers mentioned that setting up of resource rooms for children with special needs was also one of the provisions. 20% of the teachers also mentioned that special aids and provisions for children with visual impairment and children with hearing impairment helped these children in classroom activities and examinations such as facility of a writer and scribe, hearing aids etc. The facility of free camps and medical checkups were also considered by 20% teachers as an important facility provided by schools. Teachers responded that these checkups helped assess students' physical and mental health from time to time. Only 13.3% and 6.6% teachers mentioned about scholarships and exercise equipment respectively as a facility provided by government and higher authority for CWSN. On the other hand, 26.6% teachers responded that there were no such aids or provisions provided by the government for children with special needs while 20% teachers mentioned that they were not aware of any aids or provisions. The teachers' responses showed that most of the teachers are aware of the various aids provided by the government in their schools. The diversity in their responses shows that different schools received different kinds of aids or provisions that the teachers have mentioned in their responses.

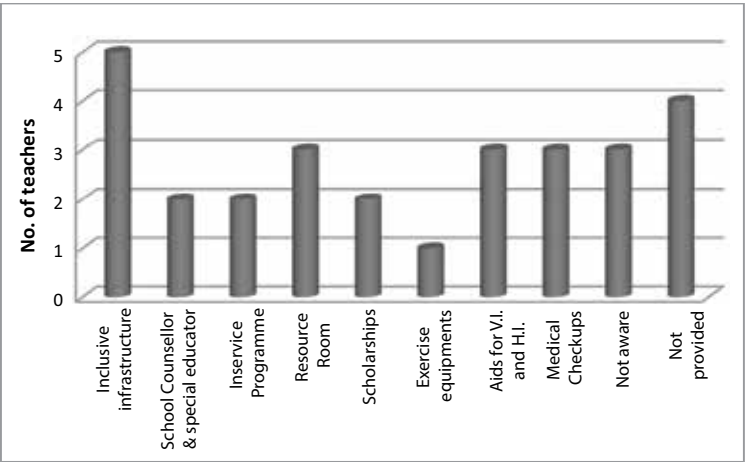


Figure 6. Aids/Provisions Provided by Government or higher Authorities

**Provisions for CWSN provided by the schools**

Based on responses, it was found that significant number of teachers (40%) perceived that their schools have inclusive infrastructure to cater to the needs of children with special needs (Figure 7). Teachers in their responses mentioned about various provisions such as, railings, ramps, provisions to have classes in ground floor etc. Next category which has significant number (33.33%) of responses is role of special educator and counselor. But teachers’ responses indicated that the provision of special educator was not the same in all the schools. Such as one of the government school teachers responded as “a special educator is there for CWSN but not aware of his work and procedure”. On the other hand, the teacher from another government school responded as “special educator per grade is allocated in our school to help CWSN in primary department. They help us with strategies and also take remedial of those, who need it. Pull-out program also helps in including all.” Teachers’ workshops organized by schools, providing appropriate teaching equipment to teachers and provisions of resource room for teachers and students was reflected equally in the responses of teachers of both schools (i.e., 20%). 13.33% of teachers mentioned about parent teacher meetings when asked about the provisions provided by schools to CWSN. According to teachers, in these meetings awareness about various provisions provided by government were discussed with parents. Few teachers (6.66%) also highlighted

the relaxation in evaluation procedure to CWSN, providing study material to students and making an inclusive environment in schools. The teachers' responses showed that the teachers viewed provisioning in different ways and were able to report various provisions available for CWSN in their schools. As most teachers have responded in terms of inclusive infrastructure, it implies that infrastructural provisioning is most prevalent in schools. Similarly, presence of a special educator or counselor also is one of the most common provisions mentioned by the teachers. Other provisions significantly mentioned in the responses of teachers were teachers' workshops, resources rooms, study material and parent teacher meetings.

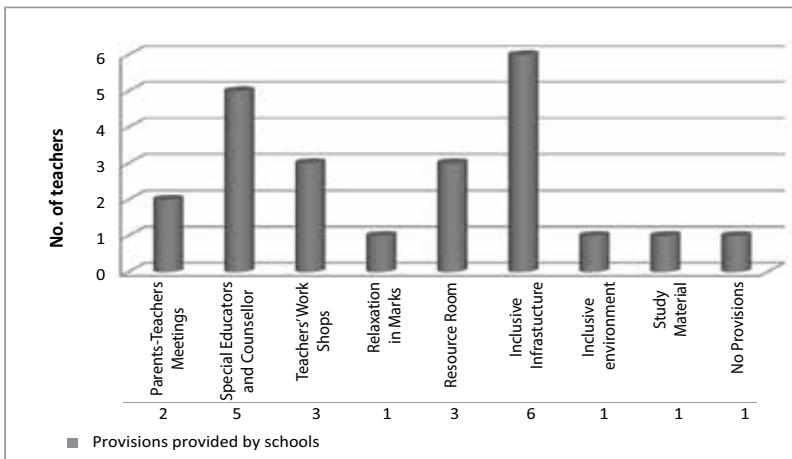


Figure 7. Provisions for CWSN Provided by Schools

### ***Appropriateness of provisions for CWSN prescribed by the government or other authorities from teachers' perception***

In response to the question on appropriateness of provided provisions, a majority of teachers i.e. 53.3% teachers responded that the provided provisions are not appropriate (Figure 8). One of the teachers reasoned that the provisions were not appropriate as different policies give provisions for children with different needs. As a result, some groups of children got ignored and were not included most of the time. Another teacher responded that mere providing provisions was not enough and there was a need to prepare regular teachers to understand the needs of each child. Thus, the provisions should be able to sensitise teachers and make

them equipped with strategies to engage children with special needs in meaningful ways. She stressed that since the provisions fail to do so they were not appropriate. 20% of the teachers responded in favor of the question and mentioned that the provided provisions were appropriate, but they have not given the reasons for the same. 13.3% teachers considered that the provided provisions were appropriate to some extent. One of the teachers shared that while NCF 2005 had stressed the concept of inclusive education, it was not being applied in the schools in its full sense. A moderately high percentage of teachers i.e. 13.3% teachers answered that they were not in a position to respond to this question. The teachers' responses show that most teachers perceived that the provisioning was not appropriately done for inclusion.

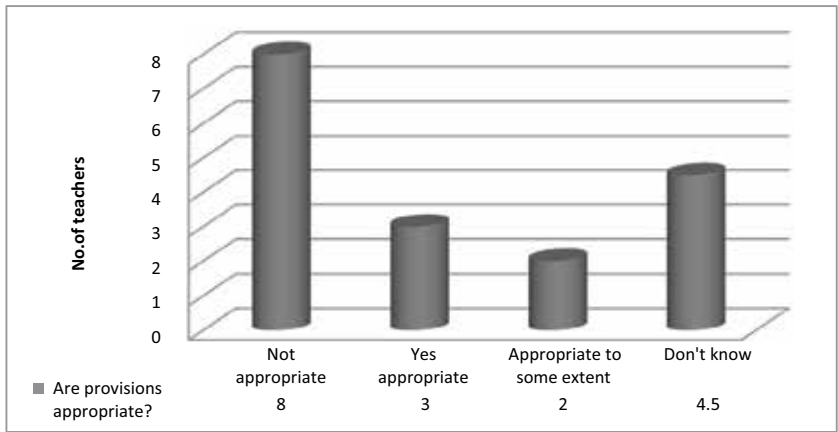


Figure 8. Are Provisions Appropriate?

**Provisions and aids used by teachers to engage CWSN in their classes**

This sub-theme intended to capture the types of aids and provisions used by the teachers to cater to the needs of children with special needs in their classroom (Figure 9). Out of various responses, significant numbers of teachers (46.6%) used differential teaching strategies to cater effectively towards the needs of children with special needs (as per their understanding). One of the teacher from inclusive school responded about differential teaching that “....according to varied different levels of our learners either I give them extra task or higher challenge or lower down the difficulty of task, by providing some more visual aids and reducing

expectations.” This showed that most of the teachers gave importance to differentiating teaching strategies and classroom adaptations for including CWSN children in their classroom. The responses to this question validated the other responses as it showed that the provisioning done by most teachers was in terms of the modifications in teaching which was done at their level only. Other provisions and aids were yet to reach to schools and finally to teachers so that they could be effectively used for engaging children with special needs meaningfully.

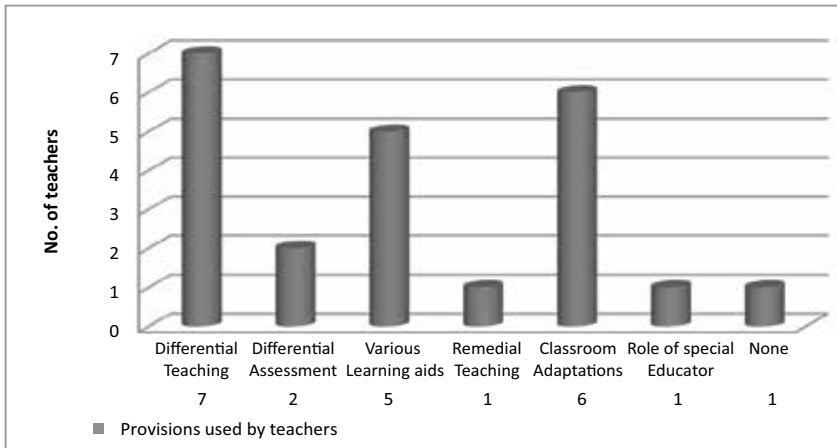


Figure 9. Provisions/Aids Used by Teachers

### Discussion and Implications of the Study

The responses of teachers show that only CWSN belonging to few categories are present in most of the schools. This could be children with visual or hearing impairment or children with loco motor handicaps and those with learning disability have been considered for mains streaming in the policy which is merely on the basis of IQ and nature of impairment (Dev et. al, 2017) implying that not children from all categories have been included. Thus, the categorisation or labelling not only separates them but also creates a hierarchy within them which is based on some pre-deterministic criteria related to their ability to learn. Precisely, these are amongst some of the categories that are listed in the MHRD document (2003) as list of disabilities that ‘can be integrated in the normal school system’ which shows the impact of policy treaties on the school system. These deterministic assumptions



about children in the policy discourses are being questioned as they not only influence the major decisions such as placement of the child in special or regular school but also keep raising the questions such as 'where or whether the child could be educated?' (Dev, et. al, 2017; Singal, 2014).

One key factor that surfaced during the study is the submission by the teachers regarding their unpreparedness to engage with CWSN which indicates the need of appropriately conceptualized teacher education programmes. The unpreparedness of teachers has also got reflected in their responses where they have shared that whether it is identification of the CWSN or engaging them in the classroom, the teachers were managing on their own based on their 'limited understanding' gathered during their teacher education programs. The phrase 'limited understanding' used by them implies that they expect more from the teacher education programs with respect to preparing themselves for inclusion. Bharti (2016) in her study, by analysing each course of the three pre-service teacher education programs that were taken in her study has critically discussed that the pre-service teacher education programs were not geared towards inclusion. One of her concluding remarks are read as, *Pre-service teacher training degree courses were not engineered to train for teaching in inclusive classroom, despite the same being strongly advocated in the National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Educators (NCFTE) 2010 prepared by NCTE. The content of pedagogy related courses in general education programme, were found to lack required emphasis on addressing the special educational needs in the inclusive classrooms* (Pg. 272). Also, several studies (Gunjal, 2017; Bhatnagar and Das 2014; Di Gennaro et. al. 2014; Shaukat et. al. 2013) have tried to study teachers' attitudes towards inclusion as it is a vital precursor for planning teacher education programs (Graham and Scott, 2016). Thus, teacher education programmes not only should have inclusion as one of the compulsory courses, but all other courses need to be aligned with the idea so that an attitudinal change can be brought in the teachers (Harrup et. al.). As Rouse (2008) says that teacher preparation should not only involve equipping them with certain practices/strategies but to enable them to challenge their attitudes towards inclusive education. Hence, the idea of inclusion cannot get reflected in school practices until a deliberate effort is being made by the teachers to bring a change in their attitudes and also understand the social contexts of learners in

their classroom that requires that teacher education programs provide experiences of diverse contexts of learners for developing sensitivity amongst future teachers. Although, most teachers have shared that the special educator was available in their schools, yet the teachers' responses did not reflect the contribution, or the role attributed to the special educators in their respective schools. This shows that more effective collaboration was required between teachers and special educators so that it has meaningful influences on the school practices. Also, for both societal and school changes, it is essential that teachers work effectively in collaboration with special educators (Simpson, et.al., 2003). This, as an experience, should also be part of the teacher education programs.

### **Conclusion**

In the light of teachers' perceptions studied, it can be said that the Delhi schools are preparing themselves for inclusion in terms of enrolling children with special needs, providing infrastructural facilities that are inclusive to certain extent and provision of a special educator to each or a cluster of schools. But, the present study shows that certain categories of children are present in more numbers in the schools than the other categories that is the enrollment is yet not representative of the diversity that exists amongst children with special needs. Thus, we must go a long way to bring children with all kinds of disabilities find place in regular schools. As per teachers' responses in the study, the long prevailing issue of high student-teacher ratio in Indian context seems to be acting as one of the major barriers in this process. Also, as echoed by teachers the responsibilities other than teaching given to them in schools, leaves them with very less time for focusing on the specific needs of children. Although, the teachers are making efforts on their part to understand the needs of their children but as evident from their responses, it is based on their limited understanding about the children with special needs. For identification as well as for planning adaptations or modifications in classroom processes, they are mostly managing on their own. The availability of the special educator also needs to be taken up as an important part of provisioning for the children as well as for supporting teachers. Similarly, the teacher education pre-service as well as in-service programs have to be geared up towards inclusion so that the teachers develop conviction and feel better prepared to manage and engage all children in their class meaningfully. Needless to say

that various other provisions and aids are yet to reach the teachers and subsequently to their students that can empower them towards becoming independent members of the society. It requires creation of a collaborative mechanism in schools where teachers, parents, special educators and other concerned school personnel work together towards establishing practices in schools that are beneficial for children according to their diverse yet specific needs.

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