



Mentally Challenged Children In The Inclusive Set-Up As Perceived By Parents

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The essential elements in the educative process are a creative mind, a well integrated self, socially useful purpose and experiences related to the interests, needs and abilities of individual as a participant in social living. In the past decades education of children with disabilities has seen a paradigm shift from a segregated education to inclusive education with non-disabled children. Mental deficiency or feeble-mindedness means marked limitation of intelligence, due to retarded development, which result in social and economic incompetence. Mentally retarded children (MCC) are characterized by low intelligence in comparison with normal children and there are various degrees of this retardation. The Educable mentally retarded child has been defined as "One who has potentialities for development in minimum educability in the academic subjects of the school, social adjustment to such a point that he/she can get along independently in the community, and minimum occupational adequacy to such a degree that he/she can later support himself/herself partially or totally at the level. They will be able to receive basic academic skills (reading, writing and arithmetic) and acquire self-help skill, which supports them to be socially and economically independent in the inclusive set-up. They learn social adoption only in an inclusive system of education. Inclusive setting will enable the MCC to get social approval. Inclusive settings provide opportunities for the MCC to acquire the competencies, skills, knowledge and understanding of which he/she is an individual of value, for himself/herself a part from any other characteristics. These children also develop adjustment character because of acceptance attitude by their peers. Only inclusion has the potential to reduce fear and build friendship, respect and understanding. MCC are best served in inclusive setting as this is a stage where they will need to exercise their daily living skills.

There are different views regarding the education of MCC, such as segregated setting and inclusive setting. Inclusive setting is better for the education of children who are mild mentally challenged. The inclusive classroom provides a setting for these children to interact with their peers of all levels of ability, thus most accurately mirroring the real world outside school. The inclusive setting provides these children with an opportunity to interact with children who may have different ways of learning or different abilities; again, mimicking real-world experience for these children as well. The MCC has potential abilities, which can be developed with appropriate education and training to make them self sufficient and productive members of society, instead of being shunned and segregated.

Revealing from the Related Studies

The reviewed studies conducted among parents (Elzein & Luffi, 2009; Heyam, 2009; Narumanchi & Shruti 2011) reveal that the parents showed a favourable attitude towards inclusion of students with disabilities in regular classroom. Geetha and Annakodi (2006) found parents of disabled students and parents of non-disabled students were supportive in promoting inclusive education. Bochenck and Hearfer (2008) indicated that parents of students with and without disabilities perceive the inclusive classroom meets their children's needs. Parents of children with Down syndrome were found to be more agreeable to inclusion and inclusive placements, in general as compared to parents of children with disabilities other than Down syndrome (Hilbert &

Dawn, 2009).

Frederickson et al. (2006) indicated that parents involved in inclusion initiatives considered pupil progress to be a primary indicator of successful inclusion. Villeneuve et al. (2013) indicates parents found it challenging to arrange frequent and informative meetings with teachers and to exchange meaningful information with the school. Parents perceived a lack of communication on the part of educators. Gupta & Buwade (2013) found that children's age and gender as the factors that mainly influence parents' views regarding inclusion. Higher educational level, nonagricultural occupation, higher income and urban status of the family are the important factors predicting higher levels of coping strategies used by the parents of mentally challenged individual (Ramesh & Upadhyaya, 2007).

Method of Study

The authors selected the survey method among the parents to evaluate the present status of Educable Mentally Challenged Children in the inclusive set-up.

Objectives of the Study

- To find out the level of status of educable mentally challenged children in the inclusive set-up as perceived by parents;
- To find out the significant difference, if any, in the status of educable mentally challenged children in the inclusive set-up as perceived by parents with regard to select background variables.

Hypotheses

There is no significant difference in the status of educable mentally challenged children in the inclusive set-up as perceived by the parents with regard to the background variables.

Population and Sample

The population of this study included 698 of Educable Mentally Challenged Children studying in Standards from II to V from normal schools in Kanyakumari District. The sample consisted 500 parents of educable mentally challenged children studying in Standards II - V from the normal schools of Kanyakumari District.

Tool Used

The tool used in this study was RoWi's Scale on the Status of EMCC studying in Inclusive Set-up (RoSoMI) developed by the authors (2011). The scale deals with gathering data regarding the dimensions (a) Academic status, (b) Social status, (c) Psychological status, and (d) Administrative status. It is a four point scale. Content validity was established with the help of three experts. As per their suggestions, some of the items were rearranged among the dimensions. Finally the tool consisted of 203 items, of which 117 were positive and 86 were negative. The Scale with 203 items was administered to a sample of 60 parents of EMCC studying Standards II - V in the inclusive schools.

The final draft of 155 items, of which 113 were positive and 42 were negative. The authors established reliability of the tool by split half method and it was found to be 0.983, and the half-test reliability us-

ing the Spearman-Brown formula was found to be 0.991. This shows that the correlation was very high (Best & Kahn, 2010, p.383) and thus reliability of the tool was established.

Analysis of Data

Independent t – test for large groups was employed for analyzing the data.

Table 1
Level of Status of EMCC in the Inclusive Set-up as perceived by the Parents

Level	No.	%
Low	64	12.8
Moderate	346	69.2
High	90	18.0
Total		100

The above table shows that, more than three-fifth (69.2%) of the parents perceived the status of EMCC in the inclusive set-up as moderate.

Table 2
Difference in the Status of EMCC in the Inclusive Set-up as perceived by the Parents with regard to Background Variables

Dimension	Gender	No.	Mean	SD	t value	P value
Gender	Male	253	75.76	6.97	1.23	0.22 ^{NS}
	Female	247	76.52	6.78		
Locality of Residence	Rural	416	76.38	6.92	1.79	0.07 ^{NS}
	Urban	84	74.91	6.60		
Type of Family	Nuclear	292	76.16	7.23	0.082	0.94 ^{NS}
	Joint	208	76.11	6.37		
Locality of School	Rural	416	76.38	6.92	2.23	0.02*
	Urban	84	74.91	6.60		
Type of School	Government	297	76.03	6.99	1.26	0.21 ^{NS}
	Aided	203	76.85	6.71		

**Significant at 0.01 level

NS - Not significant

FINDINGS

- More than three-fifth of the parents perceived the status of educable mentally challenged children in the inclusive set-up as moderate.
- There is no significant difference in the status of educable mentally challenged children in the inclusive set-up as perceived by the parents with regard to gender, locality of residence, type of family and type of school. It is also true with all the dimensions - academic status, social status, psychological status and administrative status.
- The rural parents perceived the status of educable mentally challenged children in the inclusive set-up as better than that by the

urban parents.

- The Aided school parents perceived the academic status and social status of educable mentally challenged children in the inclusive set-up as better than that by the government school parents.

Interpretations and Discussion

More than 69.2% of the parents perceived the status of EMCC in the inclusive set up as moderate. The study by Shady et al. (2013) supports the finding that most teachers (74%) believed that students with disabilities would be exposed to positive role models as a result of inclusion.

There is no significant difference in the status of mentally challenged children in the inclusive set-up as perceived by the parents with regard to personal variables, familial variables professional variables and institutional variables. This finding is in synchronization with the study by Villeneuve et al. (2013) also.

Parents of children studying in rural schools had a better level of perception regarding the status of mentally challenged children in the inclusive set-up. It could be due to the fact that rural parents in rural area were not able to take much academic care of their children. Children from rural area studied in government or government aided schools received the benefits and they were also able to improve academically, psychologically socially and economically. Parents of such children depended entirely on the teachers with respect to the improvement of their children's status.

Recommendations

If both urban parents of educable mentally challenged children from urban area are working, one of the parents must sit and spend quality time with the child on daily basis for enhancing their academic skills, communication skills, social skills and psychological skills. Parents and teachers must work together for the improvement of educable mentally challenged children in the inclusive set-up. The home that "backs up" the work of the school goes along way to ensure good learning. Parents can provide opportunities for reinforcement of learning at home if they are aware of what is happening at school. Parents should build a positive relationship with their child's school. They should share information with the teacher/principal on inclusive practices. Parents should keep in touch with the classroom by attending Parent-Teacher meetings and other meetings about the children with disabilities. An effort should be directed towards strategies that increase the value and occurrence of parent-teacher interaction as this support academic growth and achievement of their wards.

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