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## Teachers' Perception about the Inclusive Education (IE) Practices in the Government Schools in the Batticaloa District of Sri Lanka

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### ABSTRACT

This study investigates into the perceptions of government school teachers about Inclusive Education (IE) practices and the scope for future improvement of IE practices in the Batticaloa district in Sri Lanka. The quantitative and qualitative approaches were employed for conducting the research process; survey method was followed to carry out the research. Both classroom teachers and subject teachers from whole inclusive schools of the Batticaloa District were selected as sample for this study. Questionnaires were utilized for collecting data from 1740 samples. However, 462 completed questionnaires were received by the researcher. Quantitative methods were employed for analyzing and for finding the outcome of the research with the support of SPSS16. Specifically, frequencies, mean value and crosstabs analysis were utilized for finding of results.

According to the findings, majority of the teachers are female and younger and also majority of teachers have a degree and postgraduate degree as educational and professional qualification. Moreover, average mean value of the responses is 3.29; it shows that teachers have a positive perceptions about the IE practices. However, when compared with each indicator, teachers have negative perceptions in relation to the financial facilities, support of the parents and Individual Education Plan (IEP) practice in the IE practices. Furthermore, the inclusive classroom teachers are more positive than subject teachers in their perceptions. However, inclusive classroom teachers also have negative perceptions in relation to the practice of IEP. Moreover, the Batticaloa Education zone is generally good in IE practices. However, Batticaloa West zone is low in IE practices. Conclusion; the perception of teachers about IE is positive but nearly average and unequal among regions and professions. And therefore a mechanism should be devised and implemented for creating an awareness among teachers and other stakeholders.

**Key Words:** Inclusive education, Classroom teachers, Subject teachers, and Perception.

### INTRODUCTION

IE is a child's right, not a privilege. Moreover, in recent times the great deal of attention paid to the children and to childhood is unprecedented (Mag, Sinfield & Burns, 2017). IE is of paramount importance, because every child is unique in its own way. Furthermore, over the past three decades there has been a worldwide widespread paradigm shift in special education towards 'IE practices' (Hettiarachchi & Das, 2014). In line with that, IE system has developed and it is also the trend of the Universal Education. However, developing countries have to go a long way in implementing the IE system. Especially, the South Asian countries including Sri Lanka are practicing to a certain extent the inclusion system (UNICEF, 2009).

The IE system was introduced in Sri Lanka in the 1990s. It is heartening to note that the National Policy on Disability for Sri Lankan Report (2003) has underscored the fact that Sri Lanka has made a remarkable improvement in providing educational opportunities to children who have disability at primary level in normal classrooms. Additionally, the action plan: 2012-2016 highlighted the fact that IE is still in its developing stage in Sri Lanka.

Besides that, education has moved toward the implementation of the IE policy in Sri Lanka. Nevertheless, Disability Organizations Joint Front (2017) has reported that there are gaps in the IE practice and facilities for Children with disabilities in Sri Lankan education system. Therefore, the researcher has investigated into this area and explore the practice of IE in Sri Lankan education system. And thereby, the researcher has identified the importance of the

perceptions of teachers about IE practices and how it may support the future development of IE practices in Sri Lanka.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

**Aspects of IE Practices:** Giangreco (1997) recommended the following aspects of practices of IE system viz, collaborative teamwork, a shared framework, family involvement, general educator ownership, clear role relationships among professionals, effective use of support staff and meaningful Individual, Education Plans. In addition, Winter and O’Raw recommended the following aspects for the IE practices such as provision of information, physical features, inclusive school policies, the IEP, student interaction, staffing and personnel, external links, assessment of achievement, curriculum and teaching strategies (Forlin, Chambers, Loreman, Deppeler & Sharma, 2013). According to above suggestions, professionals and their perception about IE practices is of vital importance for the inclusion of students with Special Educational Needs (SEN).

**Practices of IE in Sri Lanka:** There are a number of benchmarks in relation to IE provision in Sri Lanka. It is evident that the integration of children with special needs into regular schools started in 1960s. And it created the opportunity to include students with SEN in regular schools. Moreover, the following National and International documents provided the guidelines for inclusion of students with SEN in regular classrooms. For instance; the report of National Education Commission (1992) emphasized ‘the establishment of a pervasive pattern of social justice’ as one of the national goals of education. The Salamanca Convention of 1994 also gave further motivation to adopt the concept of inclusion of children with SEN. In 1997, the Compulsory Education Act was passed and the Educational Reform of 1997 had an impact on the delivery and quality of educational services to students with SEN. Moreover, the Educational Reforms of 1997 emphasized the education of students with SEN in mainstream schools (UNICEF, 2003).

Sri Lanka has made much improvement in providing educational opportunity to children at primary level who have disability. (National Policy on Disability for Sri Lankan report - 2003). In addition to that, The Action Plan of Ministry of Education - 2012 to 2016 stressed that ‘provisions for educational opportunities with adequate facilities for children with SEN is also regarded as an essential requirement to ensure total participation’. However, Disability Organizations Joint Front (2017) report gives a negative perceptions in IE practices in Sri Lanka. Therefore, an investigation into professionals’ perception about IE practices in Sri Lanka is very essential.

**Gaps in IE Practices regarding Teachers:** Gunawardena and Ekanayake (2009) observe that, the Zonal Education Directors played an important role in creating an inclusive culture in Sri Lanka. However, Hettiarachchi and Das (2014) highlighted the fact that competence among inclusive teachers was at a low level when compared with that of special education teachers. It was also noticed that most of primary school teachers in Sri Lanka were not adequately trained to teach in a regular classrooms. And it was also lamented that a lack of mandatory teacher training for them to adopt themselves for the accommodations of the students with SEN (Alwis, 2015). In the light of the about findings it is evident that there are challenges with regard to the teachers in IE practices in Sri Lanka.

**How Students with SEN are Perceived by Teachers:** Lebbe (2010) found out that, though disability is gradually being discussed at the national development agenda, disabled people are still categorized as a separate group of "vulnerable individuals" and their needs and rights were not considered by the teachers in the mainstream development. Moreover, Alwis (2012) shows that, regular class teachers have not changed their teaching procedures or processes to provide appropriate instructions for all students in an inclusive classroom. Furthermore, ‘the local resources and opportunities for people with disability are limited; the analysis underscores the importance of coordination, teachers’ attitudes, and mutual support from the villagers, in promoting community mobilization’ Masateru (2014). It seems that the teachers do not have a positive perception about disabled children in Sri Lankan education context.

**Recommendations for Improvement of IE Practices:** Alwis (2012) stated that, a teacher assistant is crucial for effective implementation of IE in Sri Lanka. Abeywickrama, Jayasinghe and Sumanasena (2013) both teachers and parents with SEN dominated the learning environments in the schools regarding children with disabilities, Furuta (2009) observed that, the provincial social service department provided the facilities needed for pre-school level children with disabilities (Furuta & Alwis, 2017). The recommendations also highlighted that, the teacher have to be show moulded and committed to the education of students with SEN.

**Needs of IE Practices in Sri Lanka:** Furthermore, according to Abeywickrama, et. al. (2014) the current practices in Sri Lankan education for children with disabilities did not meet the global recommendations. There is a need to design culturally compatible IE models and to achieve a paradigm shift within all communities towards inclusion. Moreover, Masateru, Kumara & Nakashima (2016) revealed there is inadequate educational opportunities for children with disability and barriers to post-school social participation in rural Sri Lanka Therefore, the IE has to be developed in Sri Lanka with support of teachers and other stakeholders. In line with that, this study investigates the perception of teachers about IE practices.

**AIM**

To investigate the perceptions of government school teachers about IE practices and the scope of future improvement of IE practices in the Batticaloa district.

**RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

1. What is the educational background of the teachers who work in inclusive classroom?
2. How do teachers perceive IE practices in the Batticaloa district?
3. What are the recommendations for future improvement for IE in the Batticaloa district?

**METHODOLOGY**

A mixed research approach was employed within a framework of a survey design for this research.

**Data Collections:** Questionnaires were used for collecting data in this study. The questionnaires were utilized for collecting data from teachers who work in inclusive classrooms. The questionnaires consisted close questions, five scale questions and open ended questions in order to collect reliable data. Furthermore, the questionnaires consisted of statements about overview of the IE practices, leadership, inclusive goal of the school, stakeholder support, assessment, improvement of students, IEP practices, finance, curriculum adaptation, competencies of teachers, alternative assessment, challenges faced by teachers and their suggestions to improve the IE practices in their schools.

**Reliability Test:**

**Table -1: The Results of the Reliability test Variables**

Variables	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Perception of IE practices	16	.927

As shown in Table - 1, the Cronbach’s alpha value for the variables exceeded the minimum required value of 0.7 and hence, the scale of variables is highly reliable.

**Participants:** There are 174 IE practicing government schools in the Batticaloa district. Accordingly, 1740 10 questionnaires were mailed to each inclusive school along with 10 questionnaires with a copy letter of permission granted by Provincial Director and a letter of request for carrying out the research. The entire population was selected as sample for collecting data. Minimum sample details are in Table – 2.

**Table – 2, Population and Samples**

Name of the Zones	IE Schools	Inclusive Classroom	Subject Teachers of Inclusive Classroom
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		<b>Teachers</b>	<b>(minimum)</b>
Batticaloa Central	31	31	31
Batticaloa West	25	25	25
Batticaloa	41	41	41
Kalkudah	49	49	49
Paddiruppu	28	28	28
<b>Total</b>	<b>174</b>	<b>174</b>	<b>174</b>

Even though 1740 questionnaires were distributed among inclusive classroom teachers and subject teachers of IE, 146 completed questionnaires from inclusive classroom teachers and 316 from subject classroom teachers of inclusive classroom were received within three months. The details of the number of teachers responded are given in Table – 3.

Table – 3, **Details of Responded Teachers**

<b>Name of the Zones</b>	<b>Inclusive Classroom Teachers</b>	<b>Responded Subject Teachers of Inclusive Classroom (minimum)</b>	<b>Responded Classroom Teachers and Subject Teachers</b>
Batticaloa Central	44	86	130
Batticaloa West	08	32	40
Batticaloa	35	96	131
Kalkudah	24	45	69
Paddiruppu	35	57	91
<b>Total</b>	<b>146</b>	<b>316</b>	<b>462</b>

**Process of Data Analysis:** Quantitative and qualitative analysis methods were utilized for analyzing the data collected. SPSS – 16 was used for analyzing data collected by closed questions and five scale questions. Frequencies, mean value and crosstabs quantitative analysis were utilized for describe the outputs of analysis. Moreover, bar charts, pie charts, tables and line charts were utilized to explore the outputs. The content analysis method was used for analyzing open ended questions.

## DATA ANALYSIS

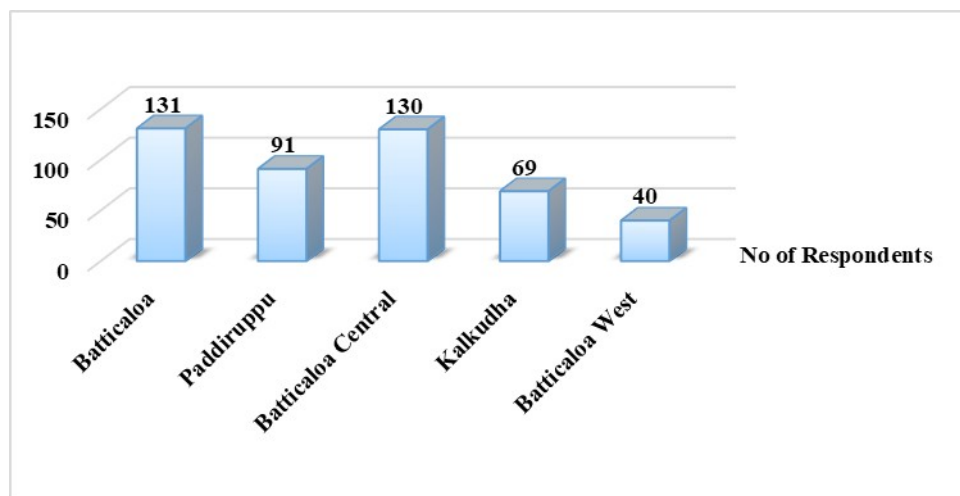


Diagram -1: **Education Zonewise Respondents Details**

Diagram – 1 shows the educational zonewise findings about the respondents for the questionnaire in the Batticaloa district. Evidently, there are educational zonewise variation in the number of respondents. 131 teachers responded in

Batticaloa Education Zone, 130 teachers responded in Batticaloa Central Education Zone, 91 teachers responded in Paddiruppu Education Zone, 69 teachers responded in Kalkudha Education Zone and 40 teachers responded in Batticaloa West Education Zone. A higher number of teachers responded from Batticaloa and Batticaloa Central Education Zones. However, a lesser number of teachers responded from Batticaloa West Zone.

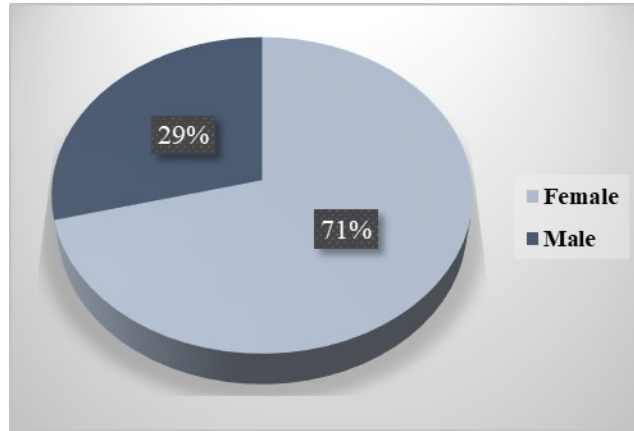


Diagram – 2: Gender Variation of Respondents

Diagram - 2 explores the gender variations of teachers’ responded in the Batticaloa district. The Pie-Chart shows that 71% of teachers responded are Females and 29% are Males. Generally, Sri Lankan teachers’ population has nearly a similar gender variation. Moreover the data shows that more female teachers are interested in teaching profession in the Batticaloa district.

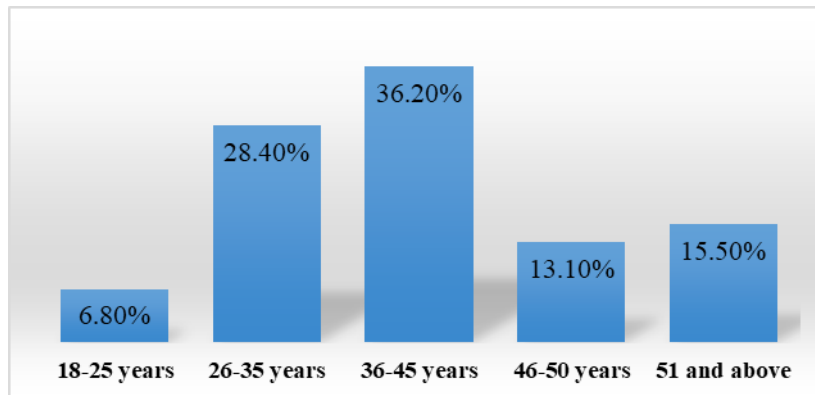


Diagram – 3: Age Profile of the Teachers

Diagram – 3 explores the age profile of teachers responded. The Bar-Chart shows that 6.8% of teachers’ age is between 18 and 25 years, 28.4% of teachers’ age is between 26 and 35 years, 36.2% of teachers’ age is between 36 and 45 years, 13.1% of teachers’ age is between 46 and 50 years and 15.5% of teachers are 51 years or over 51. The data shows that most of the teachers in the Batticaloa district are middle aged.

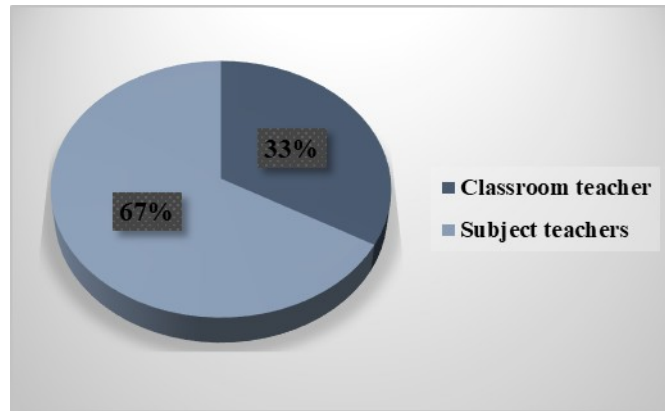


Diagram – 4: **Details of Classroom Teachers and Subject Teachers**

Diagram - 4 illustrates that, 67% of teachers’ responded work as subject teachers, 33% of teachers’ responded work as a classroom teachers in the Batticaloa district.

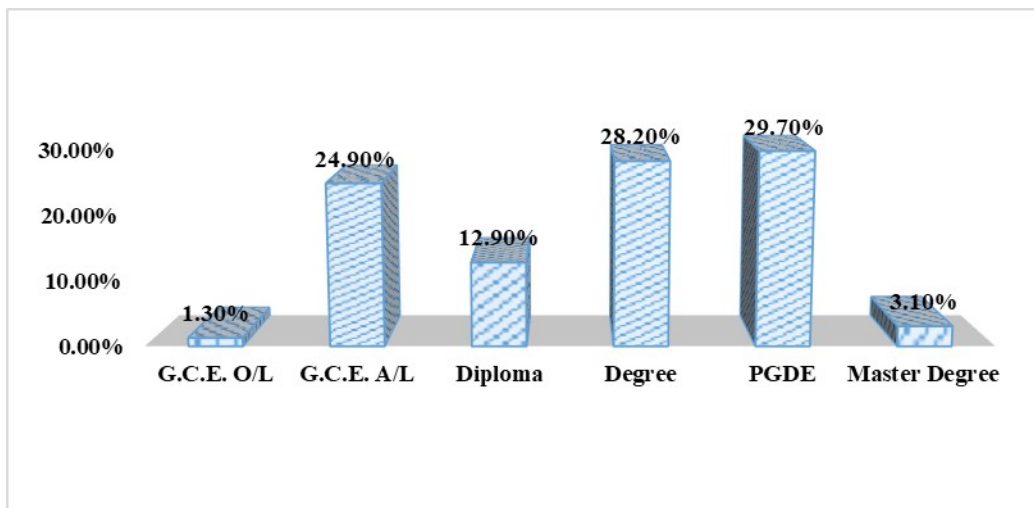


Diagram – 5: **Educational Qualification of the Teachers**

Diagram – 5 shows the educational qualification of the teachers responded. According to the diagram, 1.3% of teachers have G.C.E.O/L qualifications, 24.9% of teachers have G.C.E.A/L qualifications, 12.9% of teachers hold a Diploma, and 28.2% of teachers are Degree holders. 29.7% of the teachers have done PGDE, and 3.1% of the teachers have a Masters Degree. According to the findings, more than 60% of the teachers responded have a Degree or a Post Graduate Degree 26.2% of the teachers responded have G.C.E.O/L and G.C.E.A/L qualifications. According to the school curriculum, teachers who have G.C.E.O/L and G.C.E.A/L qualifications did not have opportunities to learn about special needs education or IE practices.

Table - 4 illustrates the perceptions of the teachers about IE practices in the Batticaloa district. The average mean value of perceptions about IE practices in the Batticaloa district is 3.29. In addition to that the average mean value shows that, the teachers have a positive perceptions about IE practices in the Batticaloa district. However, there are variation between indicators in relation to the IE practices. For instance, 3.96 mean value is the highest of for perceptions about ‘school leadership with reference of IE practices’. However, the lowest mean value is 2.64 for perceptions about ‘practices of IEP for students with SEN’. Besides that perceptions on ‘support of the parents for IE practices in your school’ ‘practices of IEP for students with SEN’ and ‘financial facilities for practicing IE in your school’ have a mean value of less than 3.0. However, perception in relation to the indicators have more than 3.01 mean value.

Furthermore, the holistic findings shows that, school leaders are more supportive for IE practices. However, with regard to the teachers' perception, there are challenges in relation to the support of the parents for practicing IE, practices of IEP for students with SEN and financial supports for practicing IE in their schools.

On the other hand, according to the teachers' perceptions most of the indicators such as, inclusive set up, school goal, support of teachers, principals, peer students, school administration and ISA/ADs, on diagnosis assessment regarding special needs students, development of students with SEN, adapted curriculum for IE practice, teachers' competencies in relation to the inclusive classroom practice and alternative assessment in inclusive classroom are remarkably good in the Batticaloa district.

Table – 4: Mean Value of Teachers Responses

S.N	Statements	Mean Value
1	How do you feel about inclusive set up in your school?	3.58
2	How do you feel about the school leadership with regard to IE in your school?	3.96
3	What do you think about the relationship between school's goal and IE practices?	3.47
4	Support of Inclusive classroom teacher/Subject teacher/s of inclusive classroom for practicing IE in your school?	3.67
5	Support of principals for practicing IE in your school?	3.74
6	Support of parents for practicing IE in your school?	2.97
7	Support of peers for practicing IE in your school?	3.03
8	School Administration for practicing IE in your school?	3.24
9	Support of ISA/AD of special Education for practicing IE in your school?	3.21
10	What about your awareness on diagnosis assessment regarding special needs students who are accommodated in your inclusive classroom?	3.51
11	What do you think about the development of students with SEN in your school?	3.25
12	How do you feel about financial facilities for practicing IE in your school?	2.70
13	How do you feel about practices of IEP for students with SEN	2.64
14	What level of curriculum do you have adapted for IE practice?	3.04
15	How do you feel about your competencies with regard to the inclusive classroom practice?	3.35
16	What do you feel about alternative assessment you use in inclusive classrooms?	3.33

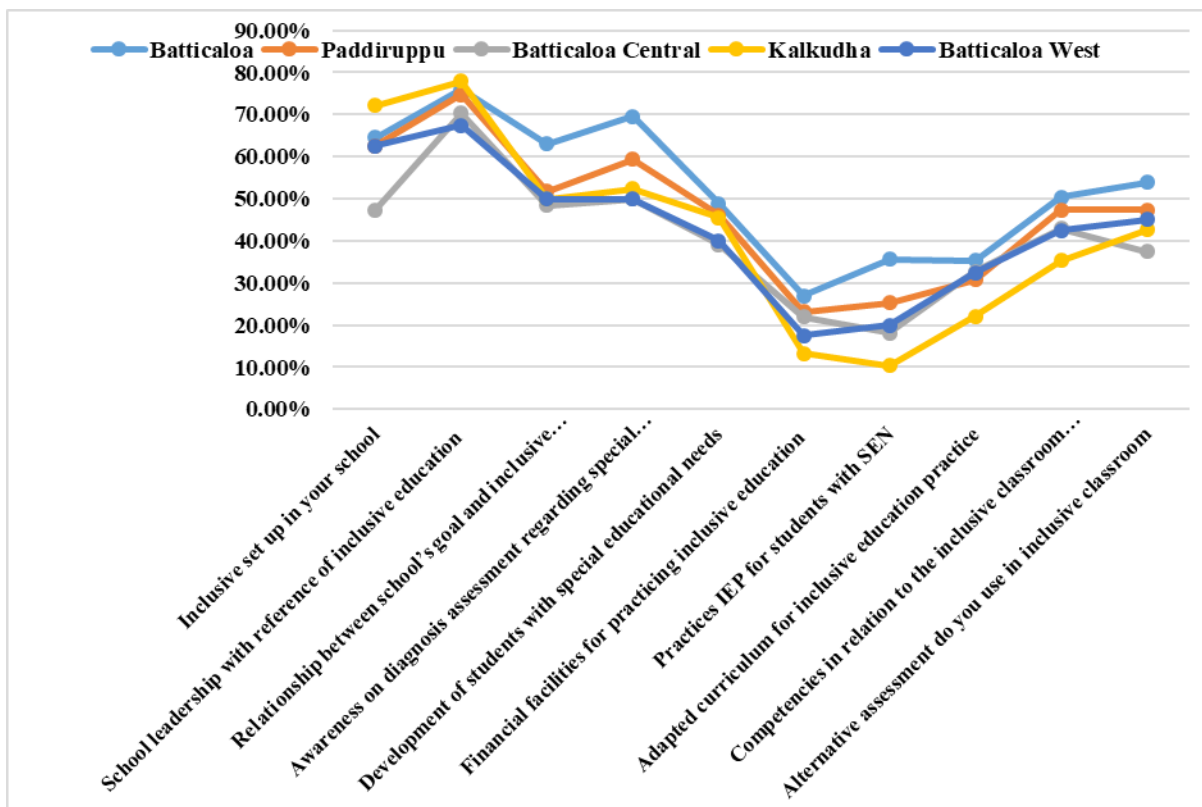


Diagram – 6: Educational Zonewise Teachers' Responses

Diagram – 6 shows the analysis of perceptions of teachers about IE practices in education zones in the Batticaloa district. Holistically, the Batticaloa Education Zone's teachers overall perceptions is good when compared with other educational zones. While Batticaloa Central and Batticaloa West teachers' overall perception is low when compared with other education zones. This findings illustrate that there are educational zonewise variations in teachers' perceptions about IE practices in the Batticaloa district.

Moreover, when compared with the other educational zones, the Kalkkuddah education zone teachers' responses are the highest for certain indicators, such as 'inclusive setup in your school' and 'school leadership with reference to IE'. However, the Kalkkuddah education zone teachers' responses is the lowest in certain indicators such as 'financial facilities for practicing IE' 'practices IEP for students with SEN' 'curriculum adapted' for IE practices' and 'competencies in relation to the inclusive classroom practices'. This findings prove that an education zones teachers' perception is best for certain indicators, whereas it is the worst for certain other indicators.



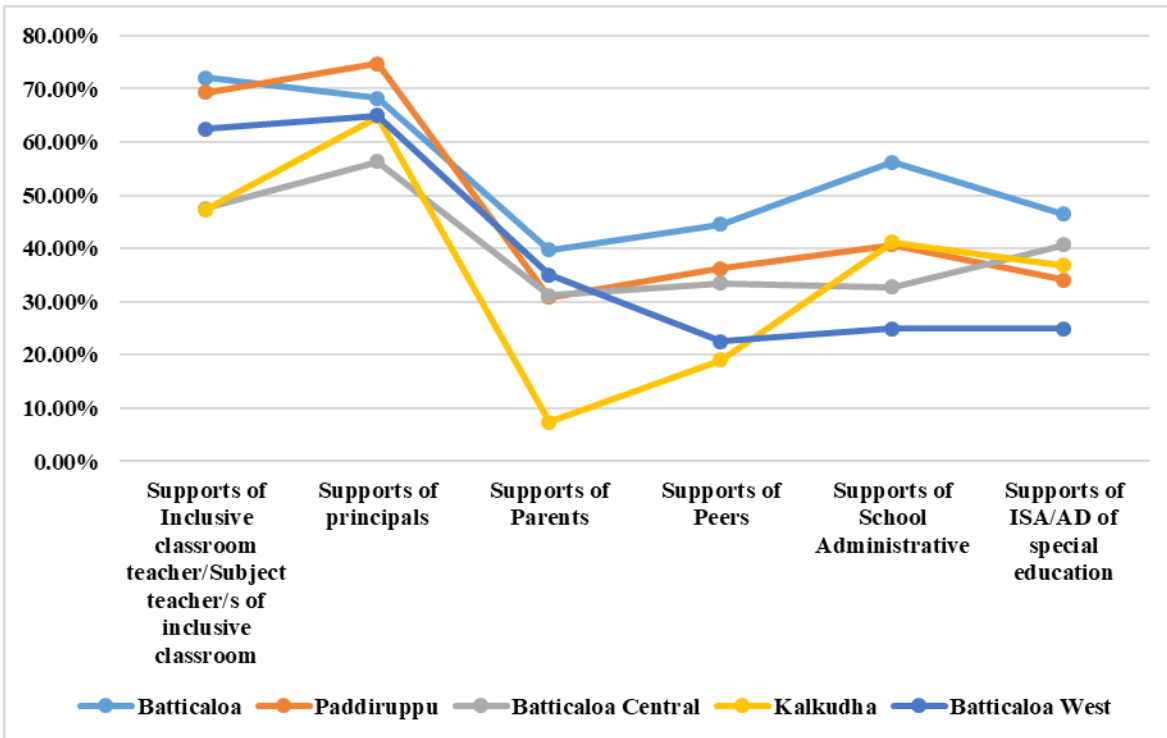


Diagram – 7: Perceptions of Teachers about Stakeholders' Support in Education Zone Wise

Diagram – 7 illustrates the perceptions of teachers about stakeholders' support educational zone wise. Holistically, the Batticaloa educational zone teachers' have the highest positive perception about the supports of the stakeholders in relation to the IE practices. However, Kalkkuddha education zone teachers have the lowest level of perception about the stakeholders' support for IE practices. Moreover, all education zone teachers have a positive perception about support of the teachers (classroom teachers and subject teachers) and principals than that of the stakeholders. However, all the education zone teachers have a negative perception with regard to parents' support for IE practices.

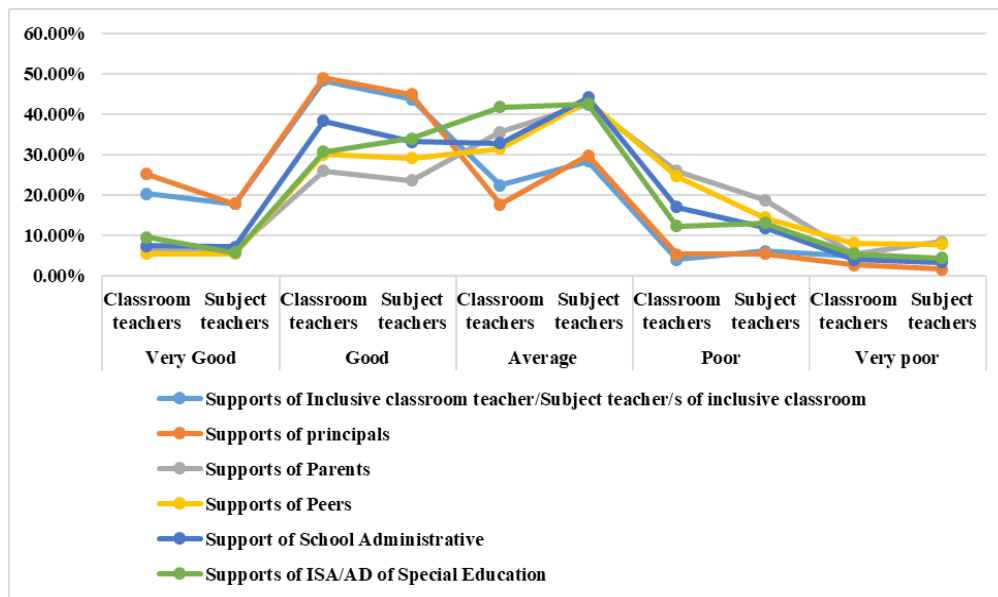


Diagram – 8: Classroom Teachers' and Subject Teachers' Perception about Stakeholders Support for IE Practices

Diagram - 8 explores the perceptions of classroom teachers and subject teachers. According to the findings teachers' have a higher perception about support of the classroom teachers and subject teachers and support of the principals with regard to the IE practices. When compared with the perception of subject teachers and classroom teachers, classroom teachers' perceptions is higher. Even though other stakeholders support is low, classroom teachers' perception is higher with regard to the support of the school administration, support of the peers, and support of the parents for IE practice in Batticaloa district. However, classroom teachers' perception is low with regard to the support of the ISAs/ADs of special education for IE practices.

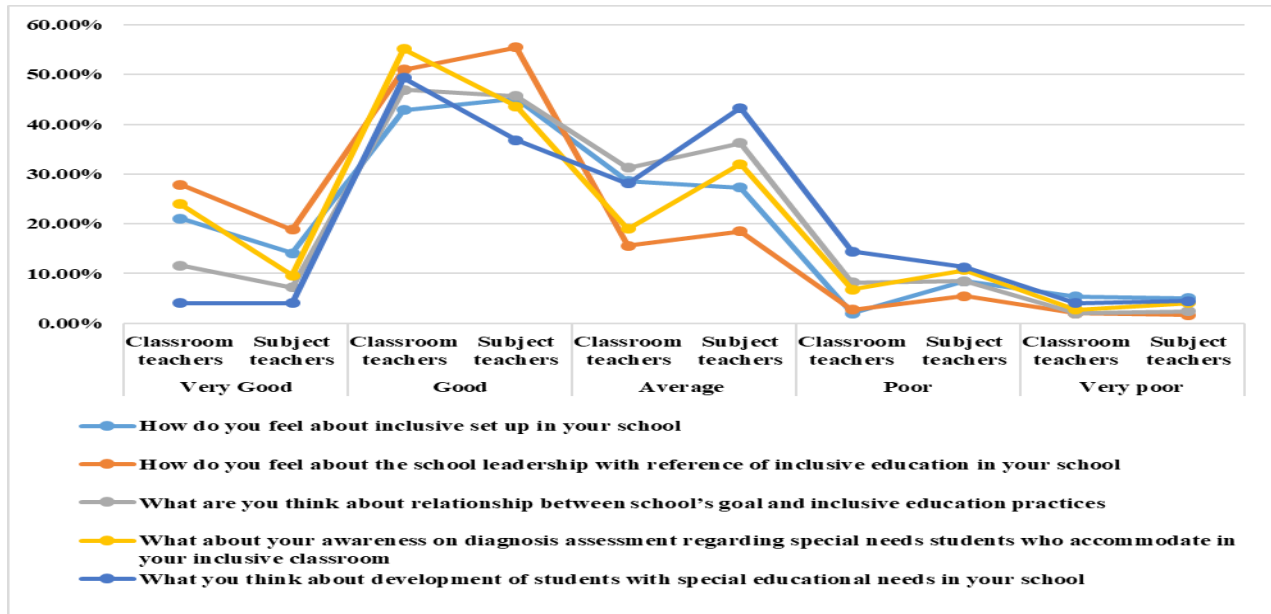


Diagram – 9: Teachers' Perceptions about Aspects in relation to the IE Practices

Diagram - 9 explores the perception of the subject teachers and classroom teachers in relation to the IE practices. The findings shows, perception of both inclusive classroom teachers and subject teachers mostly positive. Moreover, most of the teachers showed a very good or an average perception.

When compared to the inclusive classroom teachers' and subject teachers' perception, majority of inclusive classroom teachers have a higher positive perceptions than subject teachers about the following indicators, 'IE setup in your school', 'school leadership with reference to IE practices in your school', relationship between school's goal and IE practices' and 'awareness of diagnosis assessment regarding special needs students who are accommodated in their classrooms'.

Moreover, subject teachers have a higher perception than classroom teachers is at an 'average level' about 'IE setup in your school', school leadership with reference of IE practices in your school', relationship between school's goal and IE practices' and 'awareness on diagnosis assessment regarding special needs students who have accommodated in classroom' in relation to the IE practices.

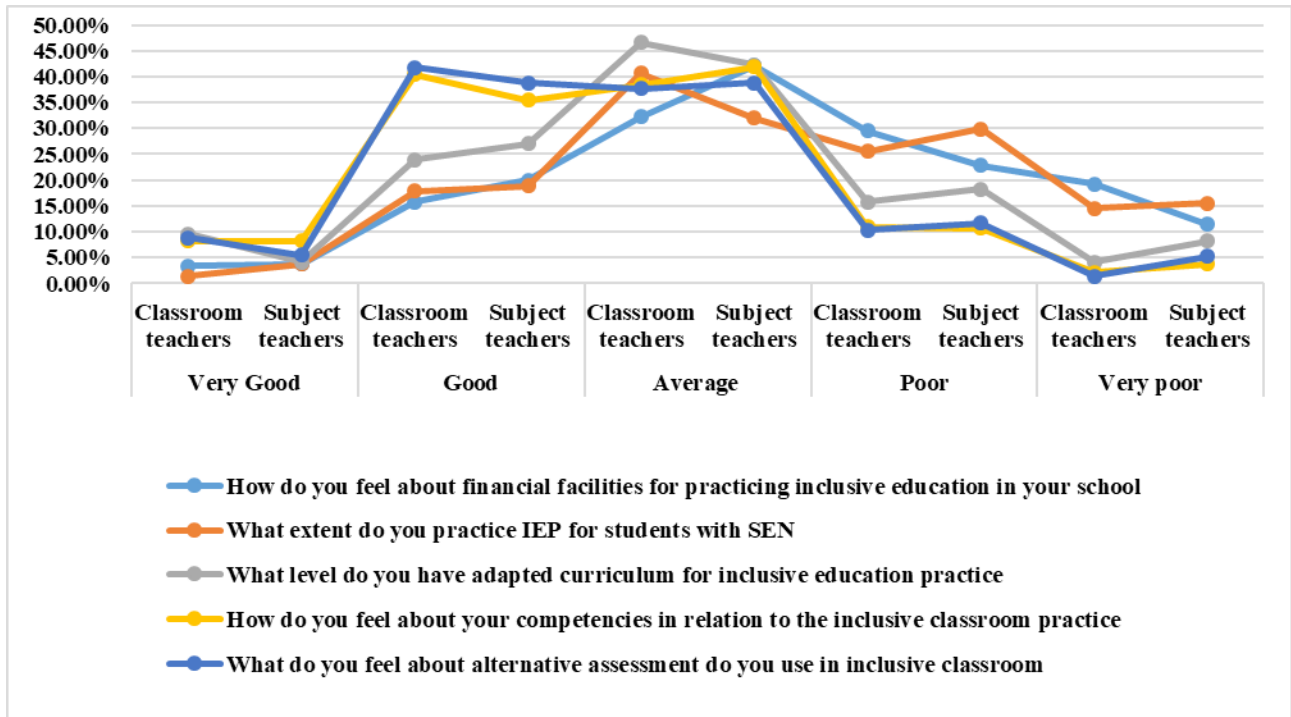


Diagram –10: Teachers’ Perceptions about Aspects in relation to the IE Practices

Diagram -10 shows the teachers’ responses on factors in relation to the IE practices. According to the findings, the perceptions of the both inclusive classroom teachers and subject teachers’ perceptions is positive in relation to indicators such as ‘teachers’ competencies in relation to the IE practice’ and ‘alternative assessments in inclusive classroom practices’. In comparison, perception of the classroom teachers and subject teachers’ perceptions regarding the above indicators, classroom teachers’ perceptions is the highest and highly positive.

Moreover, teachers’ perceptions regarding practices of IEP for students with SEN is at a low level. When compared to classroom teachers, the subject teachers have a higher positive perceptions about the practices of IEP for IE practices. However, subject teachers have a highly negative perception than the classroom teachers in relation to the indicators in relation to the IE practices.

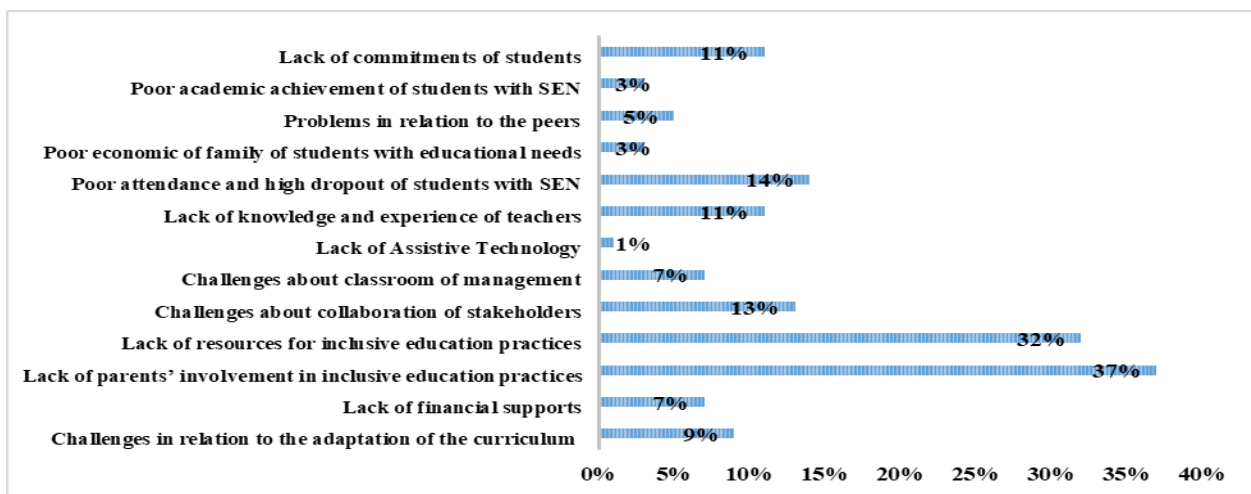


Diagram – 11: Challenges about IE Practices

Diagram -11 illustrates the analysis of the responses of the teachers to open ended questions to find out the challenges in relation to the IE practices in the Batticaloa district. According to the analysis, 37% of teachers expressed that lack of parents' involvement in IE practices is a challenge to practicing IE. For examples, teachers stated that, 'parents are careless regarding their children's education', 'lack of parents and teachers communication', 'getting parents and community support are more challenging' and 'support of parents and students are inadequate'. Moreover, 32% of teachers responded that the lack of resources for IE practice is a challenge for inclusive system in the Batticaloa district.

According to the findings, the lack of the parents' involvements in IE practices, support, and inadequate resources for IE practices, poor attendance and high dropout of the students are major challenges in relation to the IE practices in the Batticaloa district.

## **FINDINGS**

Majority of the teachers who work with students with SEN in the Batticaloa district are Females. Furthermore, majority of teachers are of or under 45 years of age in the inclusive classrooms in the Batticaloa district. Consequently, majority of teachers have at least Degree. However, certain numbers of teachers have G.C.E.O/L and G.C.E.A/L qualifications.

Subject teachers and classroom teachers have shown their interest by responding to the questionnaires it explores shows the characteristics of teachers of the Batticaloa district. Teachers interests in relation to IE practices differ zonewise and professional wise.

Teachers have positive perceptions in relation to the IE practices. School leadership about IE practice seems to be more positive in the Batticaloa district. In addition to that, most of the indicators in relation to the IE practices have positive perceptions among teachers. However, more challenging things are support of parents for IE practices, financial facilities for IE practices and practicing IEP for IE practices in the Batticaloa district.

Overall, the Batticaloa education zone has remarkably good IE practices out of the five educational zones of Batticaloa district. On the other hand, the Batticaloa West education zone has poor IE practices according to the perception of teachers responded. Moreover, Kalkuddha education zone is good in some indicators whereas poor in some indicators.

Moreover, support of teachers and school principals are good in relation to the IE practices in the Batticaloa district.

Classroom teachers' perceptions is better than subject teachers about support of the stakeholders and indicators in relation to the IE practices in the Batticaloa district.

Lack of parents' involvement in IE practices, resources for IE practice and poor attendance and higher dropout of students with SEN are more challenging problems in relation to the IE practices in the Batticaloa district. On the other hand, most of the teachers made suggestions to appoint special trained teachers for IE practices and to conduct awareness programmes for stakeholders in relation to the IE practices for improve the IE practices in the Batticaloa district.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study concludes that, teachers have positive perceptions about IE practices. Principals are more supportive for IE practices. Support of the patents, financial practices and resources are inadequate. There is educational zonewise variations in the practices of IE in the Batticaloa district. Therefore, some mechanism should be devised to improve the IE practices in the Batticaloa district.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Reinforce all the teachers to show interests in working for the development of disabled children in the IE system.
- Moreover, maintenance of equity and equality in educational zonewise and gender wise across the Batticaloa district.
- Conduct in-service programmes on IE for teachers who needs knowledge and skills in relation to the IE practices in the Batticaloa district.
- Moreover, take action to include a module or course about IE in all the teacher education programmes.
- Entire stakeholders have to have a perception in relation to the IE practices of a students with and without SEN in a regular school.
- Therefore, school administration and educational administration have to take action to create the positive perception among all the stakeholders.
- The vital factors in IE practices are IEP, financial facilities and involvement of parents. Therefore, take action to practice above mentioned factors in IE practices in the Batticaloa district.
- The education administration has to take action to minimize the educational zonewise variations of the IE practices in the Batticaloa district.
- Moreover, improve the stakeholders' involvement of the IE practices such as subject teachers, parents, community members and so on.
- Furthermore, adequate human resources and physical resources are needed to provide for IE practices in the Batticaloa district.
- Students with SEN have to be taken under the special care in IE practices in the Batticaloa district.

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