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UNDERSTANDING PERCEPTIONS OF SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS TOWARDS RPWD ACT, 2016: KEY TO INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT
Inclusive education acts as vital aspect of the present school curriculum ensuring accessibility and opportunities equally for all without any discrimination. Such approach enables individuals to perceive the notion of full inclusion and thereby help them to develop fundamental skills of life. The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 enacted by the Indian Constitution aims to uphold the principles of inclusive education promoting supportive atmosphere for persons with disabilities at all levels of education. However, besides multiple benefits, the teachers may encounter specific challenges in their teaching-learning situation for implementing such practice in general mainstream education. Therefore, the present research study aimed to analyze the perceptions of secondary school teachers regarding their awareness towards the Act, understandings, and challenges faced in executing inclusive practices in schools. The researchers employed qualitative research approach such as in-depth interviews through semi-structured and open-ended questionnaires to obtain the relevant information. The secondary school teachers constituted the study sample and finally the findings were analyzed thematically. From this research study, the researchers would delve to offer meaningful insights regarding teachers' perspectives on training needs, awareness on various strategies for inclusive classrooms and policy recommendations to address the contemporary setbacks for inclusive learning.

KEYWORDS: *RPWD Act 2016, Secondary School Teachers, Perceptions, Inclusive Education*

INTRODUCTION
In the contemporary situation, inclusive approach has been regarded as a notable pathway creating a paradigm shift in the overall educational setup. The educational stakeholders undertake a crucial role in identifying the existing rights exclusively meant for persons with disabilities and thereby arranging necessary means for their welfare. India also witnessed a radical change due to the advancement of inclusive approach in education. According to the Census Report of 2011, the country accounts for about 2.2% persons with disabilities. Such individuals are generally the most marginalized communities who are deprived of the basic rights and social amenities in life. They usually encounter multiple barriers associated with accessibility and opportunity issues in education (**Byrne, 2014**). The RPWD Act, 2016 emphasizes inclusive education across the country in compliance with the fundamentals of United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and provisions of Right to Education Act (2009).

Secondary schools play a very indispensable role in imparting quality education to all students by bridging the foundational learning with opportunities for higher education. Hence, secondary schools usually shape the future of the students by enabling them to build strong academic foundations and communication skills, equipping them with fundamental life skills, preparing them for future endeavors through proper exploration of their strengths and weaknesses. Inclusion is required to transcend physical accessibility for incorporating changes of attitudinal as well as pedagogical aspects **(Kumar & Kaur, 2020).**

However, it has been observed that in many cases, despite of numerous government initiatives, the disabled students appeared to be the most underprivileged groups in availing the basic amenities for pursuing education. The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 is a significant legislation that aims to promote equal opportunities to disabled individuals. Hence, implementation of this Act in secondary schools is extremely necessary for fostering diversity and establishing supportive atmosphere for the PWD students. Though the RPWD Act, 2016 offers a strong legal framework but its successful implementation often faces barriers due to the unpreparedness of the teachers and improper allocation of educational resources.

Effective inclusion of disabled students in regular schools depends on teachers' attitude and their roles. It has been observed that training received on inclusive education had a positive influence on their attitude towards inclusion of such learners (**Kushta, 2016**). For imparting quality education to PWD students at secondary education, the secondary school teachers are required to be prepared mentally and skillfully with appropriate pedagogical knowledge (**Baidya & Baidya, 2025**). A research study finding revealed that though most of the teachers were aware about the notion of inclusion yet they were ignorant about the RPWD Act, 2016 and faced several constraints in implementing inclusive practices at secondary

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schools in Mizoram (**Ralte & Hnamte, 2025**). Despite of various ongoing research studies across the nation concerning the implementation of the RPWD Act, 2016, yet the translation of the guidelines enumerated by the act for inclusive education into actual practice continued to be a substantial obstacle in secondary schools.

The secondary school teachers are required to create adequate opportunities to such PWD students that may encourage a sense of inclusivity in classrooms. They may help students in transmitting the essential life skills for attaining full potentials. Various study findings exposed that the teachers may undertake a vital role in accomplishing the task of delivering quality instructions as per their learning needs and capacities. Therefore, teachers' active involvement is highly encouraged for promoting inclusivity in schools. Hence, the present research study attempted to explore the perceptions of secondary school teachers towards the Act and its implementation.

Operational Definitions of the Key Terms

- **Perceptions:** In the present research study, it refers to the understanding and opinion of the secondary school teachers concerning RPWD Act, 2016 and its implementation.
- **Secondary School Teachers**: In the study, it refers to the teachers' teaching students at the school from Class V to Class X functioning under the West Bengal Board of Secondary Education.
- **RPWD Act, 2016**: Here, it refers to the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 exclusively meant for the persons with disabilities in ensuring fundamental human rights.
- **PWD students**: In this study, it refers to the students with any form of disabilities or impairments in their bodies.
- **Inclusive Education:** Here, it refers to the educational approach ensuring equal participation of both abled as well disabled learners in same regular classroom for their education.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To explore the perceptions of secondary school teachers towards RPWD Act, 2016 and its implementation in secondary schools
2. To study the perceptions of secondary school teachers with respect to-

a) Significant challenges faced in implementing inclusive practices in secondary schools as mentioned by the RPWD Act, 2016

b) Major recommendations for successful implementation of RPWD Act, 2016 promoting inclusive education in secondary schools

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The objective of the study is to provide insight into the following research questions:

1. What are the perceptions of secondary school teachers towards RPWD Act, 2016 and its implementation in secondary schools?
2. What challenges do the secondary school teachers face in implementing inclusive practices in secondary schools as mentioned by the RPWD Act, 2016?
3. What recommendations do the secondary school teacher suggest for successful implementation of RPWD Act, 2016 promoting inclusive education in secondary schools?

MATERIALS AND METHODS USED IN THE STUDY

In the present study, the researchers have employed qualitative research approach to collect the data through conducting in-depth interviews. Qualitative research method has enabled the researchers to obtain the necessary information about the respondents' understanding, experiences and existing knowledge **(Welman & Wilson, 2020).**

Prior conducting interviews, informed consent has been obtained by the researchers from all study participants. Permission has been taken from the Head of the Institutions to conduct the research study. About fifty secondary school teachers from about ten Government secondary schools in Kolkata involved in the present study. The study participants were being briefed about the purpose of the study and about the confidentiality of the data obtained for it.

The researchers have collected data by using semi-structured open-ended Information Schedule which consisted of mainly two sections: first, section representing the participants background information and the second section included the open-ended questions regarding their perceptions towards RPWD Act 2016, significant challenges in implementing inclusive practices and major recommendations to address those challenges for successful implementation of the RPWD Act, 2016 in secondary education.

The prepared open-ended questions have been reviewed by four subject experts belonging to four state universities of West Bengal for obtaining face as well as content validity. Convenience sampling technique has been used to collect the necessary data since many secondary school teachers were reluctant to take part in the current research study. However, the researchers strived to address the formulated research questions by adopting thematic analysis for analyzing the responses obtained from the study. Depending on

Braun and Clarke (2006), the researchers derived six-phases of thematic analysis. It included-

Phase-1: Familiarizing with data obtained
Phase-2: Formulating initial codes
Phase-3: Searching themes
Phase-4: Reviewing the searched themes
Phase-5: Defining themes and assigned names
Phase-6: Generating report

The data obtained for the present study was the responses of the secondary school teachers and written notes, audio-recordings that were taken by the researchers during the interview session and were then transcribed later. However, the responses were coded initially and then categorized in different themes by the researchers independently. As a result, three thematic constructs evolved which were conceptual understandings of

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the RPWD Act, 2016, challenges and recommendations. The result of the present qualitative analysis has been presented under those themes that have been concerned with the formulated research questions. The researchers conducted the fieldwork for data collection between November and December 2025. A set of leading questions used to guide the in-depth interviews with the participants:

- How do you understand Inclusive Education; What is the significance of inclusive education in contemporary education system?
- What are the challenges did you face during teaching-learning in facilitating inclusive practices?
- What recommendations do you suggest to promote inclusive education in secondary schools?

DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

The current research study investigated the perceptions of secondary school teachers on RPWD Act, 2016, challenges on implementing inclusive practices and major recommendations for addressing those challenges effectively. The basic themes were identified by the researchers based on the formulated research questions and after analyzing the responses and textual data. Theme-wise analysis has been presented in this section-

- **Based on Research Question 1:** Perception of secondary school teachers towards RPWD Act, 2016 and its implementation in secondary schools

Theme 1	Explanation
Conceptual Understanding about RPWD Act, 2016	Secondary school teachers lack knowledge about the RPWD Act, 2016 and not aware about the various inclusive practices in education exclusively meant for the PWD students. Inadequate knowledge and awareness exist among the secondary school teachers about different disability issues, necessary adaptations in curriculum, meeting learning needs of the PWD students for better learning outcome

Respondents' feedback obtained pertaining to Theme 1 (Conceptual Understanding about RPWD Act, 2016)

The participants representing the secondary school teachers gave positive response while replying "*What is your perception of inclusive education?"* But, they hardly response about the guidelines and provisions of the RPWD Act, 2016 fostering inclusive education. However, the overriding consensus was that inclusive education is the need of the present hour. In this connection, the following are the representative responses of the present study-

"Inclusive education ensures educational accessibility and opportunities to disabled students."

"Inclusive education empowers the PWD students to acquire the basic life skills."

"Inclusive education encourages socialization of disabled students and develop confidence among them to express their thoughts and emotions."

"It is essential to impart necessary training on inclusive practices for secondary school teachers to get acquainted about varied issues of disabilities and their proper measures."

"In reality, the guidelines of the RPWD Act, 2016 regarding inclusive education are quite challenging to adopt in regular classroom settings."

Some respondents also mentioned that *"some of us are still not aware about inclusive education."* Another secondary school teacher expressed that *"we all are not familiar with the RPWD Act, 2016 and its major provisions for disabled students. Before implementing the guidelines, the teachers need to be acquainted with the necessary knowledge of the Act."*

However, most of the respondents wished to receive proper training on inclusive educational practices and expressed the importance of such approach in the present era.

- **Based on Research Question 2:** Perception of secondary school teachers with respect to significant challenges faced in implementing inclusive practices in secondary schools as mentioned by the RPWD Act, 2016

Theme 2	Explanation
Challenges	Pressure of completing syllabus within stipulated time, non-availability of any directives to develop IEP and alternative assessment procedure, lack of in-service training, lack of pedagogical knowledge, problem in establishing effective communication with PWD students are some major challenges. Other includes irregular visit or absence of any special educator, lack of proper resource rooms, reluctance of parents to involve in the academic affairs of the children.

Respondents' feedback obtained pertaining to Theme 2 (Challenges)

The majority of the respondents replied "*yes"* when asked about, *"Do you face any challenge in facilitating inclusive practices in classroom?"*

Most of the secondary school teachers stated that *"syllabus*" is the foremost hurdle to facilitate inclusive practices. The pressure of completing syllabus usually does not provide enough time to adopt inclusive strategies.

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Another respondent remarked that *"they do not have any kind of directives from the school authority to develop individualized education plans and alternative assessment procedures for PWD students."*

One of the secondary school teachers mentioned that "*we usually face lot of challenges in integrating disabled students in regular classrooms. Though we are mentally prepared to impart education to such students, yet some challenges such as huge student strength in class, lack of enough time, pressure of completing syllabus, inadequate resources often hinder us to pay special attention to such disabled students in classroom."*

Another respondent remarked that "*one major problem is to effectively communicate with the disabled students in classroom and adopting appropriate teaching strategies to meet their learning requirements."*

In fact, it has been observed from the study that the secondary school teachers were not trained in imparting inclusive education. though they were willing to implement such approach, but lack of pedagogical knowledge and necessary skills often hindered them to establish effective communication with PWD students in classrooms. Furthermore, they stated that the teachers hardly received any scope for attending in-service training concerning inclusive education.

Another major challenge was to involve parents of the PWD students in regular consultation with teachers. In this line, majority of the secondary school teachers argued that the parents were not interested to involve in matters like regular consultation, academic affairs of the children. Only few parents actively involve in parent-teachers meeting.

Moreover, the respondents pointed out that the workload and responsibilities designated to them in schools act as barriers to implement the guidelines of the RPWD Act, 2016 viably.

- **Based on Research Question 3:** Perception of secondary school teachers with respect to major recommendations for successful implementation of RPWD Act, 2016 promoting inclusive education in secondary schools

Theme 3	Explanation
Recommendations	A couple of good responses received includes creating awareness about the guidelines of RPWD Act, 2016, provision for in-service training, infrastructural facilities, educational resources, appointment of special educators, arrangement of remedial classes to bring improved learning outcome of PWD students

Respondents' feedback obtained pertaining to Theme 3 (Recommendations)

A handful of feedback received regarding the question, *"What are the recommendations you suggested in promoting inclusive education in secondary schools?"*

The most frequent reply obtained for recommendations included *"Creating awareness about guidelines of RPWD Act, 2016; provisions of in-service training on inclusive practices; provision for resource rooms, appointment of special educators, arrangement for remedial class."* Some respondents also expressed their views on *"provisions of appropriate infrastructures in schools and educational resources."*

Many secondary school teachers stated that remedial class would be beneficial to enhance academic performance of the PWD students. Moreover, the study findings exposed that the secondary school teachers were not well-versed in dealing with inclusive strategies ensuring PWD students' holistic development. Hence, seamless collaboration of secondary school teachers with special educators and other educational stakeholders is highly imperative to facilitate inclusion of PWD students in regular classrooms optimally.

CONCLUSION

From the current research study, it may be concluded by saying that most of the secondary school teachers were still unaware about the concept of inclusive education and also about the notion of the RPWD Act, 2016. After briefing about the purpose of the study concerning the educational provisions enumerated by the Act for students with disabilities, they were willing to acquire the necessary in-service training to develop their knowledge and skills in executing inclusive practices in regular classroom. The secondary school teachers realized that fostering inclusivity in secondary schools is very much crucial for ensuring equitable educational opportunities for all students. The educational stakeholders are required to adopt a proactive approach in implementing the guidelines of the RPWD Act, 2016. They are required to make comprehensive plans to foster inclusive practices in a viable manner. The school authorities are needed to expand the educational opportunities, infrastructural amenities, adequate funding for procuring the essential provisions for assistive learning devices for PWD students. these measures may ensure them with right to quality education. Existing guidelines of the Act need to be thoroughly as well as regularly reviewed to address the confronting barriers for successful implementation of the Act at secondary education. Therefore, such perception study may enable the educational stakeholders in bridging the observable gaps in knowledge and awareness about the Act skillfully.

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