

Effective Classroom Placements for Students with Disabilities

Ann M. Trimm-Alcaez*

School of Education, Liberty University

*Corresponding Author

Ann M. Trimm-Alcaez, School of Education, Liberty University.

Submitted: 2025, Feb 03 Accepted: 2025, Mar 14; Published: 2025, Mar 17

Citation: Trimm-Alcaez, A. M. (2025). Effective Classroom Placements for Students with Disabilities. *J App Lang Lea*, 2(1), 01-04.

Abstract

In today's classrooms, placement setting appropriate for students with disabilities has continued to be the center of controversy with administrators, teachers and school leaders. There has been an ample amount of research in inclusion versus pull-out program, teacher's perception in inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classrooms, and the support and accommodation they will receive to succeed academically. The "one-size-fits-all" concept is still the norm when it comes to learning. Therefore, the literature review will generally conclude that there is a positive correlation between inclusion, teacher's perception and academic achievement of students with disabilities in the general education classrooms.

Keywords: Inclusion, Pull-Out Program, Teacher's Perception, Students with Or Without Disabilities' Perception, And Differentiated Instruction

1. Introduction

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that students with disabilities need to be educated to the greatest extent possible in the general education (GE) classrooms. However, concerns have emerged that inclusion in the general education classroom is not an appropriate placement for students with disabilities. Those with severe disabilities or behavioral problems need to learn in either the special education (SE) or resource room. Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973 is a civil rights law that prevents discrimination against individuals with disabilities from any institution that receives federal funds and provides for a free, appropriate public education (FAPE) [1]. Students with disabilities placed in SE programs can transition in the GE classrooms when provided with a written plan (e.g., Individual Education Plan (IEP) Program) and accommodations in support of learning. In addition, the written plan needs to identify student's strengths and weaknesses as well as a list of accommodations that will be applied and the team of professionals responsible for application. As educators struggled with inclusion in GE classrooms, more and more have changed their viewpoint, which is now focused on quality education for students with or without disabilities. Furthermore, to provide quality education, teachers will need to differentiate instruction based on the individual needs of all students in GE classrooms. To make inclusion work for students with disabilities in GE classrooms, it requires a team of teachers, administrators, school leaders, parents, and the school community. The literature review will focus on the appropriate placement, teachers' perception towards inclusion, and students with or without disabilities perception towards inclusion. In addition, with support and accommodation, will inclusion in GE

classrooms provide quality education for all students?

2. Literature Review

According to Mastropieri and Scruggs, the term 'inclusion' has been used to describe the education of students with disabilities in GE classrooms [1]. Although many definitions have been used to describe inclusion, the term simply means that students with disabilities are served primarily in the general education classrooms, under the responsibility of GE classroom teacher [1]. The term 'full inclusion' refers to the practice of educating students with disabilities full-time in GE classrooms. In contrast, the pull-out program is designed for students with disabilities learning in GE classroom, then transition to either SE or resource room most of the school day. In some cases, depending on the severity of the disabilities, special school or other special facility is necessary for the success of students with disabilities.

Karrie Shogren, Judith Gross, Anjali Forber-Pratt, Grace Francis, Allyson Satter, Martha Blue-Blanning, and Cokethea Hill conducted a study on the experienced of students with and without disabilities learning in inclusive setting, the perception of schools' cultural diversity, and implementation of practices in support of learning [2]. In the study, three themes emerged such as: (a) schools' cultural diversity reflected a sense of belonging for some students, (b) impact of inclusion is positive with students, and (c) factors such as a positive behavior support system, collaboration, and instructional practices related to students' determination and self-efficacy, feedback and re-teaching of contents, numerous wealth of representation and expression, and technology integration [2]. The study conducted interviews from 11 participants (e.g., 6 students

with disabilities and 5 students without disabilities), which two of the students had severe disabilities, from six schools within the Knowledge Development Sites (KDS) located within the United States [2]. The study allowed three to five researchers to visit each school (e.g., elementary and middle schools) for 3 to 4 days over a one year period. The outcome of the study resulted in students in diverse interpretation of the meaning of inclusion. For example, in sense of belonging, students were highly positive with the expectations in inclusive setting and connections with teachers and peers in inclusive setting [2]. Another example, in school and classroom practices, the various systems of support and accommodations received in inclusive setting enabled students with disabilities to be successful [2]. Classroom instructional practices that allowed diverse learners to receive directions, feedback, engagement, and technology based on their individual needs. The findings required that further research was needed to target specifically on the contexts of a positive school culture for learners, and an innovative way to control resources such as behavioral intervention, support and accommodation, participation of teachers, principals, and parents, and lastly, peer support [2].

In another research study conducted in 1999, Spencer Salend and Laurel Garrick Duhaney, the researchers suggested that “movement toward inclusion has created an emphasis on educating students with disabilities in GE classrooms.” Although the concept of educating students with disabilities in GE classrooms is not new, its impact on students and educators continue to be examined and argued [3]. The study examined the impact of inclusion programs on the academic performance and social development of students with disabilities, placement of students without disabilities in inclusion programs, and teachers’ responses to inclusion programs [3]. The results indicated that students with disabilities have a positive outlook for learning in SE classrooms, which they could receive academic support and extra help when needed; and in contrast, students expressed anxiety over the academic and recreational activities they were missing when they transitioned out of GE classrooms [3]. The social impact of inclusion on students with disabilities indicated that friendships satisfied their personal needs, and for students without disabilities, they indicated that learning with students with disabilities was a positive experience, especially towards supporting another individual and better able to deal with disability in their own lives [3]. Teachers’ attitude towards inclusion revealed that two-thirds of the general educators supported the placement of students with disabilities in GE classrooms; and one third of GE educators reported that factors such as time, experience, professional training, and support can contribute to a successful inclusive learning environment [3].

In Sharmila Vaz, Nathan Wilson, Marita Falkmer, Angela Sim, Melissa Scott, Reinie Cordier, and Torbjorn Falkmer’s study, they examined teachers’ attitudes toward inclusion, which is often based instructional delivery and self-efficacy, rather than lack of ideology and understanding of the meaning of inclusion [4]. The study was focused on factors associated with preschool teachers’ attitudes towards inclusion of students with disabilities in GE classrooms [4]. A cross-sectional survey was used for the study in order to

obtain results from 74 preschool teachers from various elementary schools located in Western Australia. In the study, teachers’ attitudes and self-efficacy towards integration of students with disabilities was measured using two different scales (e.g., Opinions Relative to Integration (ORI) and Bandura’s Teacher Efficacy) [4]. Factors predicting teachers’ attitudes towards inclusion of students with disabilities were based on gender, age, employment status, degree, professional development courses attendance, years of experience, and self-efficacy. The outcome of the study resulted in the following: (a) male teachers negative towards inclusion, (b) teachers 55 years and over negative towards inclusion, (c) teachers with low-level self-efficacy negative towards inclusion, and (d) teachers with professional training had positive attitude towards inclusion [4]. The limitation of study reflected a discrepancy towards acceptance of diversity and inclusion based on social and cultural contexts in which students are placed; hence, future cross-cultural studies are needed to understand these discrepancies in order to improve the practices of all teachers in inclusive setting [4].

In another study conducted by Poonam Dev and Leslie Haynes, they examined teachers’ perceptions in B-12 inclusive setting [5]. Teachers’ perspective was based on their experience working with students with disabilities who transitioned from SE and resource rooms to inclusive settings [5]. This qualitative study was designed to allow others to hear from special educators who had observed the impact of inclusion on students with or without disabilities, on themselves, and on their colleagues in GE classrooms [5]. A total of 11 participants with no experienced and those with experienced working with students with disabilities in the State of New York. Twenty-nine interview questions were utilized based on information from publications that focused on teacher perceptions and attitudes toward inclusion of students with disabilities in GE classrooms [5]. The study noted that teachers who participated had some skills and resources that were necessary for the success of all students in the GE classrooms [5]. The outcome of the study resulted in the following: (a) positive towards inclusion as the least-restrictive setting, (b) students with social, emotional or physical disabilities are served best in SE or resource classrooms, and (c) two-thirds of teachers stated that lack of or inadequate social skills among students with the disabilities is the biggest hurdle to their integration in inclusive setting (Dev & Haynes, 2015). Furthermore, ample evidence suggested that students with disabilities are more likely to make academic and social gains when placed at least part-time with their peers than when segregated [5].

In a research study conducted by Nisha Bhatnagar and Ajay Das, they examined the attitudes of secondary GE teachers towards inclusion of students with disabilities in New Delhi [6]. A total of 470 teachers, working in schools completed a two-part questionnaire related to personal and professional characteristics of teachers [6]. The major findings of the study were based on the positive attitudes towards inclusion of students with disabilities in the GE classrooms. These findings resulted in males and younger teachers (less than 40 years of age), less experienced teachers (less

than 10 years), and teachers with post-graduate education more positive towards inclusion [6]. In addition, teachers who had contact with an individual with disability and pre-service teachers who did not have a focus on disability during their pre-service programs were positive towards inclusion [6]. Moreover, those teachers with post-graduate qualifications and significant training in special education were more positive towards inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classrooms [6]. The study warranted further investigation to explore whether professional training and in-service training is needed to produce successful inclusion. In addition, to support inclusion in the general education classrooms, every participant (e.g., administrators, teachers, and school leaders) will need to be involved so that inclusion can create a positive environment for all learners.

3. Discussion

Almost four decades have passed since the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was enacted in support of a guaranteed free and appropriate public education in the least-restrictive environment for students with disabilities [6]. Although public schools began to move into inclusive education, students with disabilities continue to transition from GE classrooms into SE or resource room. Yet, many educators that provided support services for students with disabilities in GE classrooms; the move towards full-inclusion is still a controversy. According to Kettmann Klingner, Sharon Vaughn, Jeanne Schumm, Patricia Cohen, and James Forgan, teaching students with disabilities in either pull-out programs or self-contained classrooms has failed to bring about desired results. Students with disabilities learning side-by-side with their nondisabled peers in inclusive setting may effectively improve in social and learning skills. By remaining in the GE classrooms, students with disabilities can develop and sustain friendships with their nondisabled peers, and enjoy increased instructional time, as they are not transitioning from the GE classrooms to the SE or resource room. In contrast, learning in SE or resource room, students with disabilities can get support and cause less distraction, which will enable them to concentrate on their learning skills. Inclusion or pull-out, which is the best placement for students with disabilities? The response is whether or not schools are considering the appropriate placements for each student based on individual needs.

Advocates of inclusive education have called on schools to meaningfully support the participation of students with disabilities in the GE classrooms [7]. When supported with teachers in GE classrooms, inclusion can provide opportunity for students with disabilities succeed in their social and learning skills. However, at the high school level, teachers are overwhelmed by challenging curriculum, large classes, and students' performance in GE classrooms. Teachers will need effective and feasible approaches for supporting students with disabilities in high school classrooms [7]. While there is an extensive research in teachers' perception in inclusive education, effort has been focused on years of experiences and self-efficacy. Teachers who had experiences working with students with disabilities in SE or resource rooms will have an advantage in inclusive setting. With the growth in the

number of students with disabilities in GE classrooms, teachers will need to differentiate their instruction to meet the unique needs of all students. According to Michael Federico, William Herrold, and John Venn, educators need to consider a plan to implement in inclusive classrooms such as: (a) develop new teaching and classroom management strategies, (b) improve attitudes and self-efficacy towards inclusion, (c) involve parents in their students' education, and (d) secure support services, supplies, and resources for a successful inclusion program [8,9]. When teachers restructure lesson plans to facilitate differentiated instruction, they need to consider students' mixed abilities and enable each student to express his or her way of learning so that objectives can be reached. Different models of instruction can be provided in GE classrooms such as coaching, prompting, and working in small groups [10]. Students with disabilities working with their nondisabled peers in a variety of instructional activities can be productive. Furthermore, students engaged in activities actively can stay on-task; hence, active engagement during small group activities will prevent behavioral problems in students with severe disabilities. One of the most significant problems teachers encounter in inclusive setting is adapting the pace of instruction to diverse learning needs [1]. GE teachers will need to determine if pacing is an effective learning strategy for students with disabilities to master the concept of the subject matter.

As we move into the 21st century, we need to shift our roles from GE classroom teachers into a facilitator of learning. Rather than being textbook-driven or one-size-fits-all, curriculum objectives need to be interdisciplinary, collaborative, project-based, and research-driven [11]. Concept of learning is no longer the traditional way of learning, but a climate of change based on the individual needs, readiness, preferences, and interest of all students. Some students prefer learning by role modeling, working in small groups or with a buddy system, and using technology in the GE classrooms. To meet the needs of a diverse student population in the GE classrooms, teachers will need to differentiate instruction. For example; using KWL charts, graphic organizers, and educational software and websites (e.g., Language Builder, Jumpstart, Prezi.com, Wordle.com, and Animoto.com) can help students improve learning skills in math and reading. In addition, when differentiating instructions, the focus is on modifying and adapting materials and its content to meet the learning needs of each student in the classroom. Effective instructional strategies, such as cooperative learning, activity/project based learning, teaching to multiple intelligence, can be adapted not just in inclusive setting but in most classrooms as well [12]. Therefore, teachers need to provide lesson plans that will effectively cater to the diverse learners in GE classrooms. Cooperative learning is the instructional use of small groups so that students can work together to maximize their own and each other's learning skills [12]. For example, students will work together in small groups to complete a worksheet in Science lab. Assessment will depend on their team and individual efforts in small group activity.

In today's classrooms, you will observe students working in different areas of the classroom, some students are engaged in

different task or activities, discovering their learning capability; while the teacher is nearby to support, assist, and facilitate learning for all students [12]. Furthermore, you can also see one or two paraprofessionals or instructional aides assisting students with disabilities on their assigned work. In this scenario, teachers know that every classroom includes diverse learners some struggling, some advanced, and all with different life experiences, learning preferences, and personal interests [12]. When using differentiated instruction, we can adapt instruction to meet the diverse needs of each learner, providing that all students have the appropriate level of challenge and the appropriate support to help them succeed in learning [12]. We need to provide an opportunity for all students to demonstrate their knowledge of the subject matter, and to recognize their unique abilities, strengths, and weaknesses for learning. For example, students with learning disability will need accommodation in reading for Language Arts classroom.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, in my own experience, I had the opportunity to work with students with disabilities in SE or resource room and GE classrooms. Students with or without disabilities can be successful in inclusive and special setting. For example, students with disabilities work together with nondisabled peer mentors in “Yes, I Can” GE classroom, then transition to computer lab to work on math and reading skills. Effective transition from one setting to another will need the support and collaboration of all parties involved in the success of students with disabilities in learning. Teachers who are confident in self-efficacy can motivate and engage all students in the appropriate placement (e.g., inclusion or pull-out program), either one is contingent upon the individual needs of students with disabilities. In the end, it takes a village to make a program succeed for all learners. We, as educators, need to remind ourselves that our teaching is not for us; our teaching is for all the young minds that are willing to learn in our classrooms.

References:

1. Mastropieri, M.A. & Scruggs, T.E. (2007). *The inclusive classroom* (3rd ed.). Upper SaddleRiver, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc.
2. Shogren, K. A., Gross, J. M., Forber-Pratt, A. J., Francis, G. L., Satter, A. L., Blue-Banning, M., & Hill, C. (2015). The perspectives of students with and without disabilities on inclusive schools. *Research and practice for persons with severe disabilities, 40*(4), 243-260.
3. Salend, S. J., & Garrick Duhaney, L. M. (1999). The impact of inclusion on students with and without disabilities and their

- educators. *Remedial and special education, 20*(2), 114-126.
4. Vaz, S., Wilson, N., Falkmer, M., Sim, A., Scott, M., Cordier, R., & Falkmer, T. (2015). Factors associated with primary school teachers’ attitudes towards the inclusion of students with disabilities. *PloS one, 10*(8), e0137002.
5. Dev, P., & Haynes, L. (2015). Teacher perspectives on suitable learning environments for students with disabilities: What have we learned from inclusive, resource, and self-contained classrooms?. *International Journal of Interdisciplinary Social Sciences: Annual Review, 9*.
6. Bhatnagar, N., & Das, A. (2014). Attitudes of secondary school teachers towards inclusive education in New Delhi, India. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs, 14*(4), 255-263.
7. Carter, E. W., Moss, C. K., Asmus, J., Fesperman, E., Cooney, M., Brock, M. E., ... & Vincent, L. B. (2015). Promoting inclusion, social connections, and learning through peer support arrangements. *Teaching Exceptional Children, 48*(1), 9-18.
8. Gallego, M., & Busch, C. (2015). Towards the inclusion of students with disabilities: Accessibility in language courses. *Innovative Higher Education, 40*, 387-398.
9. Federico, M. A., Herrold Jr, W. G., & Venn, J. (1999). Helpful tips for successful inclusion: A checklist for educators. *Teaching Exceptional Children, 32*(1), 76-82.
10. Kurth, J. A., Lyon, K. J., & Shogren, K. A. (2015). Supporting students with severe disabilities in inclusive schools: A descriptive account from schools implementing inclusive practices. *Research and practice for persons with severe disabilities, 40*(4), 261-274.
11. Dunn, A., & Pérez, L. F. (2012). Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in action: The smart inclusion toolkit. *TEACHING Exceptional Children, 45*(2), 41-41.
12. De Jesus, O. N. (2012). Differentiated instruction: Can differentiated instruction provide success for all learners?. *National Teacher Education Journal, 5*(3).
13. Klingner, J. K., Vaughn, S., Shay Schumm, J., Cohen, P., & Forgan, J. W. (1998). Inclusion or pull-out: Which do students prefer?. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 31*(2), 148-158.
14. Logan, B. E., & Wimer, G. (2013). Tracing inclusion: determining teacher attitudes. *Research in Higher Education Journal, 20*.
15. Patterson, J. L., Connolly, M. C., & Ritter, S. A. (2009). Restructuring the inclusion classroom to facilitate differentiated instruction. *Middle School Journal, 41*(1), 46-52.

Copyright: ©2025 Ann M. Trimm-Alcaez. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.