



# **In-Service Teachers' Perceptions of Challenges in Developing Relational Capacity Among Adolescents with Intellectual Disabilities**

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**Abstract-** Relational capacity is a significant aspect of the social and emotional development of adolescents with intellectual disabilities, as it enables them to form, maintain, and understand meaningful interpersonal relationships. In educational settings, in-service teachers play a crucial role in strengthening this capacity through their classroom practices, emotional support, communication strategies, and facilitation of peer interaction. The present paper focuses on the perceptions of in-service teachers towards the challenges involved in developing relational capacity among adolescents with intellectual disabilities. The study aims to examine the mean perception of in-service teachers and to compare their perceptions with reference to selected demographic variables. A descriptive survey design was adopted, and data were collected from 60 in-service teachers working with children with intellectual disabilities in inclusive and special school settings in Delhi NCR. A self-developed structured questionnaire based on a five-point Likert scale was used to assess teachers' perceptions. The data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, including mean, standard deviation, t-test, and ANOVA. The findings revealed that in-service teachers obtained a mean perception score of 62.43 out of 100, indicating a moderate to fairly high level of awareness regarding the challenges in developing relational capacity. Further analysis showed no statistically significant differences in perception scores with reference to demographic variables such as gender, age, type of school, educational qualification, professional qualification, nature of school, locality, teaching experience, and level of teaching. The study concludes that in-service teachers generally recognize the challenges associated with relational development among adolescents with intellectual disabilities, and that these perceptions remain largely consistent across demographic backgrounds. The findings highlight the need for continued professional development, institutional support, and classroom-based strategies to promote relational inclusion and meaningful participation of adolescents with intellectual disabilities.

**Keywords-** Intellectual Disability; Relational Capacity; In-Service Teachers; Teacher Perception; Inclusive Education; Adolescents.

## **I. Introduction**

Inclusive education has become an important concern in contemporary educational practice because it emphasizes equal participation, dignity, and meaningful learning opportunities for all learners, including adolescents with intellectual disabilities. Intellectual disability is generally associated with limitations in intellectual functioning and adaptive behaviour, affecting communication, social participation, emotional regulation, and independent functioning. However, these limitations do not imply an inability to form meaningful relationships. Instead, relational development depends on



the support, opportunities, and attitudes present in the educational environment. Relational capacity involves forming and maintaining interpersonal relationships through emotional awareness, empathy, trust, communication, reciprocity, and social adaptability. During adolescence, this becomes especially important due to identity formation, peer interaction, and emotional growth. Gavron et al. (2022) noted that adolescents with intellectual disabilities possess underestimated relational competencies, while Dowling et al. (2019) emphasized that autonomy and participation develop within supportive relational contexts.

Teachers play a central role in shaping relational opportunities for adolescents with intellectual disabilities. Their perceptions influence inclusion in classroom interaction, peer activities, and communication opportunities. When teachers recognize students as capable of meaningful interaction, they foster environments of empathy, trust, and belonging. Conversely, underestimation may limit participation, reduce peer engagement, or result in overprotection. Sigstad (2018) highlighted teachers' mediating role in peer relationships, while Matsushima and Kato (2015) emphasized empathy, responsiveness, and mutual respect in teacher–student relationships. In-service teachers are particularly important because their perceptions are shaped by classroom practice, interactions with families, and institutional contexts. However, they often face challenges such as limited training, insufficient resources, and uncertainty in addressing social and emotional needs, as reported by Alshamri (2020) and Barr and Mavropoulou (2019).

Research further indicates that teachers' professional background, training, and emotional competence significantly influence their attitudes toward students with intellectual disabilities. Arcangeli et al. (2020) found that training and exposure promote more inclusive attitudes, while Hassanein (2015) stressed the importance of professional development in reducing misconceptions. Vovchenko (2021) highlighted that teachers' emotional intelligence shapes students' emotional development, suggesting relational growth is co-constructed. Despite progress in inclusive education, adolescents with intellectual disabilities often experience social isolation, with inclusion limited to physical presence rather than active participation. Therefore, examining in-service teachers' perceptions is essential to understanding challenges in developing relational capacity. The present study focuses on these perceptions and their variation across demographic variables, recognizing that teachers' experiences provide key insights into relational inclusion and social development.

## **II. Review of Literature**

Relational capacity among adolescents with intellectual disabilities has gained increasing attention in inclusive education because it is closely linked with emotional development, communication, peer acceptance, autonomy, and classroom participation. Research indicates that although adolescents with intellectual disabilities possess relational and emotional abilities, these are often underestimated due to deficit-based perceptions and social stigma. Gavron et al. (2022) demonstrated that such adolescents can exhibit collaboration, responsiveness, and mutual attunement when provided with supportive contexts, suggesting that relational capacity develops through interaction rather than being fixed. Similarly, Girgis and Paparo et al. (2025)



highlighted that emotional regulation is shaped by the quality of relational experiences, emphasizing the importance of consistent and empathetic support. These findings reinforce the idea that relational growth is dynamic and dependent on social engagement rather than inherent limitations.

The literature further stresses that inclusion should go beyond physical placement to ensure meaningful participation and reciprocal relationships. Wiesel and Bigby et al. (2024) argued that inclusive services often fail when they prioritize access without fostering social connections, while Dalkilic and Vadeboncoeur (2016) emphasized that relationships are both a means and an outcome of inclusion. In school settings, this perspective highlights the importance of creating opportunities for adolescents with intellectual disabilities to communicate, interact, and build connections. Teacher perceptions play a crucial role in this process. Sigstad (2018) identified teachers as mediators of peer relationships, noting that those who promote cooperative learning and interaction enhance students' sense of belonging. Conversely, deficit-based perceptions may result in isolation despite intentions of support. Sigstad (2017) further emphasized that teacher attitudes, classroom structures, and peer acceptance collectively determine the success of inclusion.

Teacher–student relationships are equally significant in shaping emotional and relational development. Matsushima and Kato (2015) identified empathy, responsiveness, and mutual respect as key elements of positive relationships, which help create a supportive classroom climate. Majorano et al. (2017) found that strong teacher relationships can improve self-concept and reduce loneliness among adolescents, demonstrating the broader impact of relational support. Furthermore, teachers' professional background and training influence their perceptions and practices. Arcangeli et al. (2020) and Hassanein (2015) highlighted that exposure, training, and structured interventions improve attitudes and reduce misconceptions, while Oh et al. (2011) noted that teachers often lack practical relational competence despite supporting inclusion in principle. Vovchenko (2021) also emphasized the importance of emotional intelligence, showing that teachers who interpret behaviours empathetically contribute to students' emotional development, supporting the idea that relational capacity is co-constructed.

Despite these insights, teachers frequently encounter challenges in fostering relational inclusion. Studies by Alshamri (2020) and Barr and Mavropoulou (2019) revealed issues such as limited training, inadequate resources, behavioural concerns, and communication barriers. Downing (2010) further emphasized that inclusive teaching requires collaboration, planning, and relational sensitivity, and that teachers need institutional support to succeed. Overall, the literature suggests that relational capacity is shaped by the interaction of student abilities, teacher perceptions, classroom practices, and systemic factors. While teachers are central to creating supportive environments, they also face significant practical and attitudinal challenges. Therefore, examining the perceptions of in-service teachers is essential, as their real-world experiences provide valuable insights into fostering communication, trust, peer interaction, and social participation among adolescents with intellectual disabilities.



### III. Problem Statement

Despite the growing emphasis on inclusive education, adolescents with intellectual disabilities continue to face difficulties in social participation, peer interaction, communication, and emotional expression. Their presence in inclusive or special classrooms does not automatically ensure meaningful relational inclusion. Many require structured support to develop trust, empathy, reciprocity, communication, and peer relationships, but these needs are often overlooked when educational practices focus mainly on academics, behaviour management, or functional skills.

In-service teachers play a crucial role in developing relational capacity because their perceptions influence how they understand students' social potential, respond to behavioural and emotional challenges, encourage peer interaction, and create opportunities for participation. Previous literature highlights the importance of teacher attitudes, training, emotional competence, classroom support, and institutional resources in promoting meaningful inclusion (Arcangeli et al., 2020; Hassanein, 2015; Sigstad, 2018). Studies also show that teachers face challenges such as communication barriers, behavioural difficulties, inadequate training, lack of resources, peer acceptance, and institutional constraints (Alshamri, 2020; Barr & Mavropoulou, 2019; Downing, 2010). Therefore, it is important to examine how in-service teachers perceive these challenges and whether their perceptions differ according to demographic variables such as gender, age, type of school, qualification, locality, teaching experience, and level of teaching.

#### Objectives

1. To examine the mean perception of in-service teachers towards the challenges in developing relational capacity among adolescents with intellectual disabilities.
2. To compare the perceptions of in-service teachers towards the challenges in developing relational capacity among adolescents with intellectual disabilities with reference to selected demographic variables.

### V. Research Questions

1. What is the mean perception of in-service teachers towards the challenges in developing relational capacity among adolescents with intellectual disabilities?
2. Do in-service teachers differ significantly in their perceptions towards the challenges in developing relational capacity among adolescents with intellectual disabilities with reference to selected demographic variables such as gender, age, type of school, educational qualification, professional qualification, nature of school, locality, teaching experience, and level of teaching?

#### Hypothesis

**H<sub>0</sub>:** There is no significant difference in the mean perception scores of in-service teachers towards the challenges in developing relational capacity among adolescents with intellectual disabilities with reference to selected demographic variables such as gender, age, type of school, educational qualification, professional qualification, nature of school, locality, teaching experience, and level of teaching.



## **VII. Methodology**

The methodology provides a systematic framework for examining the perceptions of in-service teachers towards the challenges involved in developing relational capacity among adolescents with intellectual disabilities. Since the study focuses on teachers' existing perceptions and compares them across selected demographic variables, a quantitative survey-based approach was adopted. The methodology includes the research design, sample, sampling technique, research tool, data collection procedure, and statistical techniques used for analysis.

### **Research Design**

The present study employed a descriptive survey design. This design was appropriate because the study aimed to describe the existing perceptions of in-service teachers without manipulating any variables. The descriptive survey method helped in collecting standardized responses from teachers and enabled comparison of perception scores across different demographic categories.

### **Population of the Study**

The population of the study consisted of in-service teachers working with children and adolescents with intellectual disabilities in inclusive and special school settings in Delhi NCR. These teachers were directly involved in teaching and supporting learners with intellectual disabilities and were therefore considered suitable participants for the study.

### **Sample Size**

The sample consisted of 60 in-service teachers. The sample included teachers from government and private institutions, inclusive and special schools, and different locality backgrounds. The participants also varied in terms of gender, age, educational qualification, professional qualification, teaching experience, and level of teaching.

### **Sampling Technique**

A purposive sampling technique was used to select the participants. This technique was suitable because the study required teachers who were specifically engaged in teaching children or adolescents with intellectual disabilities. Snowball sampling was also used to reach additional participants through professional contacts and networks.

### **Research Tool**

Data were collected using a self-developed structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was prepared on the basis of the objectives of the study and the concept of relational capacity. It consisted of two sections. The first section included demographic information such as gender, age, type of school, educational qualification, professional qualification, nature of school, locality, teaching experience, and level of teaching. The second section consisted of perception-based statements related to the challenges in developing relational capacity among adolescents with intellectual disabilities.

The perception statements focused on areas such as communication, emotional regulation, peer interaction, social participation, family involvement, institutional constraints, teacher preparedness, and availability of resources. Responses were recorded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree.



### Data Collection

Primary data were collected from 60 in-service teachers working in inclusive and special education settings in Delhi NCR. The questionnaire was distributed to eligible participants after explaining the purpose of the study. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were assured that their responses would be used only for academic purposes. Completed responses were checked for completeness before analysis.

### Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Frequencies and percentages were used to present the demographic profile of the respondents. Mean and standard deviation were used to examine the overall perception of in-service teachers. To compare perception scores across demographic variables, t-test and ANOVA were used wherever appropriate. The data were statistically analyzed with the help of SPSS software.

### Statistical Techniques Used

The following statistical techniques were used in the study:

- Frequency and percentage were used to describe the demographic profile of in-service teachers.
- Mean and standard deviation were used to examine the level of perception of in-service teachers.
- Independent samples t-test was used to compare perception scores between two-category demographic variables.
- ANOVA was used to compare perception scores across demographic variables with more than two categories.

These statistical techniques helped in addressing the objectives of the study and testing whether significant differences existed in the perception scores of in-service teachers with reference to selected demographic variables.

### Statistical Analysis

The statistical analysis was carried out in accordance with the two objectives of the study. The first objective focused on examining the mean perception of in-service teachers towards the challenges in developing relational capacity among adolescents with intellectual disabilities. The second objective focused on comparing the perception scores of in-service teachers with reference to selected demographic variables.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of In-Service Teachers

Parameter	Frequency	Percent	Parameter	Frequency	Percent
Gender			Nature of School/Institute		
Male	16	26.67%	Inclusive	15	25%
Female	44	73.33%	Special	45	75%
Total	60	100%	Total	60	100%
Professional Qualification			Age		
D.Ed.	25	41.67%	Below 25 years	17	28.33%
B.Ed.	9	15%	26–35 years	29	48.33%
M.Ed.	11	18.33%	36–45 years	8	13.33%



Other	15	25%	46 years and above	6	10%
Total	60	100%	Total	60	100%
Educational Qualification			Locality		
Graduate	30	50%	Urban	31	51.67%
Postgraduate	15	25%	Semi-urban	19	31.67%
Doctorate	15	25%	Rural	10	16.67%
Total	60	100%	Total	60	100%
Teaching Experience			Level of Teaching		
1–5 years	26	43.33	Primary	32	53.33%
6–10 years	18	30%	Secondary	16	26.67%
Above 10 years	16	26.67	Higher Education	12	20%
Total	60	100	Total	60	100%

The demographic profile of in-service teachers shows varied characteristics that may shape their perceptions of challenges in developing relational capacity among adolescents with intellectual disabilities. The sample is largely dominated by female teachers at 73.33%, while male teachers account for 26.67%. A significant proportion of teachers work in special schools at 75% compared to 25% in inclusive settings. In terms of professional qualifications, 41.67% hold D.Ed., followed by 25% with other qualifications, 18.33% with M.Ed., and 15% with B.Ed. The majority of teachers fall within the 26–35 years age group at 48.33%, followed by 28.33% below 25 years, while fewer are in higher age groups. Half of the participants are graduates at 50%, while 25% each are postgraduates and doctorates. Most teachers are from urban areas at 51.67%, followed by semi-urban and rural areas. Teaching experience and level indicate a strong representation of early-career, primary-level educators.

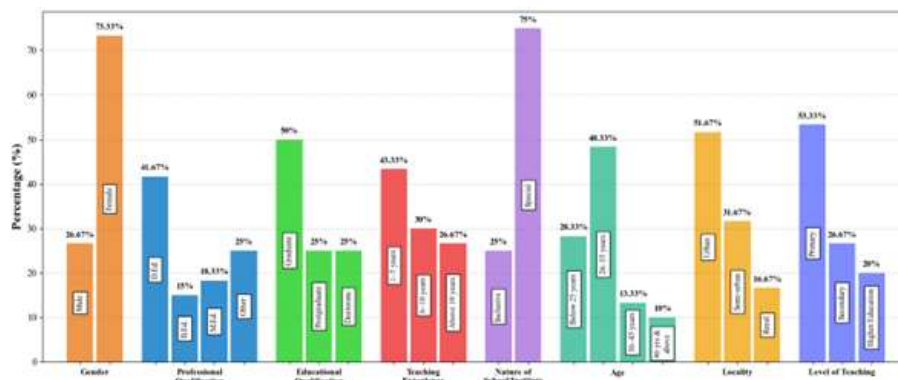


Figure 1: Demographic Profile

Objective 1: To Examine the Mean Perception of In-Service Teachers towards the Challenges in Developing Relational Capacity among Adolescents with Intellectual Disabilities



Table 2: Mean Perception Score of In-Service Teachers

Group	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Maximum Score	Percentage
In-service teachers	60	62.43	3.85	100	62.43

The findings indicate that the mean perception score of in-service teachers towards challenges in developing relational capacity among adolescents with intellectual disabilities is 62.43 percent, reflecting a moderate level of perception. The relatively low standard deviation of 3.85 suggests consistency in responses among the 60 teachers. This implies that most teachers share similar views regarding these challenges. Overall, the results highlight an average awareness and understanding, indicating scope for further training and professional development to enhance teachers' perceptions and practices.

**Objective 2:** To Compare the Perceptions of In-Service Teachers with Reference to Selected Demographic Variables

Table 3 Comparison of in-service teachers' scores on the basis of following category (independent t-test)

category	Parameter	N	Mean	SD	df	t	P
Gender	Male	16	58.50	3.37	58	0.85	0.401
	Female	44	59.66	5.08			
School Type	Government	17	59.47	3.34	58	0.12	0.902
	Private	43	59.30	5.16			
School Type	Inclusive	15	60.87	5.57	58	1.46	0.149
	Special	45	58.84	4.31			

Table 3: Comparison of In-Service Teachers' Scores on the Basis of Selected Categories (Independent t-test) shows that there are no statistically significant differences in the perceptions of in-service teachers across the selected demographic variables. In terms of gender, female teachers obtained a slightly higher mean score of 59.66 compared to male teachers with 58.50; however, the difference is not significant as indicated by  $t = 0.85$  and  $p = 0.401$ . With respect to school management, government teachers had a mean score of 59.47, while private school teachers scored 59.30, showing negligible difference with  $t = 0.12$  and  $p = 0.902$ . Similarly, in relation to school type, teachers from inclusive settings had a higher mean score of 60.87 compared to 58.84 in special schools, but this difference is also not statistically significant, as  $t = 1.46$  and  $p = 0.149$ . Since all p values exceed 0.05, the results indicate that perceptions remain consistent across all categories.

Table 4 Comparison of in-service teachers' scores on the basis of following category (ANOVA)

category	Groups	SS	df	MS	F	P-value
Age	Between Groups	0.296755	3	0.098918	0.003516	0.999709
	Within Groups	1575.637	56	28.13637		
	Total	1575.933	59			



Edu. Qualification	Between Groups	22.01667	2	11.00833	0.492665	0.613573
	Within Groups	1273.633	57	22.34444		
	Total	1295.65	59			
Prog. Qualification	Between Groups	54.83141	3	18.27714	0.824875	0.485701
	Within Groups	1240.819	56	22.15747		
	Total	1295.65	59			
Locality	Between Groups	55.28175	2	27.64087	1.270211	0.288598
	Within Groups	1240.368	57	21.76085		
	Total	1295.65	59			
Experience	Between Groups	13.5627	2	6.781349	0.30149	0.740887
	Within Groups	1282.087	57	22.49276		
	Total	1295.65	59			
Level of Teaching	Between Groups	29.17708	2	14.58854	0.600219	0.552122
	Within Groups	1385.406	57	24.30537		
	Total	1414.583	59			

Table 4: Comparison of In-Service Teachers' Scores on the Basis of Selected Categories (ANOVA) reveals that there are no statistically significant differences in the perceptions of in-service teachers across the examined demographic variables. For age, the between-groups sum of squares is 0.296755 with  $df = 3$ , yielding an F value of 0.003516 and a p-value of 0.999709, indicating no significant difference among age groups. Similarly, educational qualification shows an F value of 0.492665 with a p-value of 0.613573, suggesting no meaningful variation across graduate, postgraduate, and doctoral levels. Professional qualification also reflects non-significant differences with  $F = 0.824875$  and  $p = 0.485701$ . In terms of locality, the F value is 1.270211 with a p-value of 0.288598, indicating similar perceptions among urban, semi-urban, and rural teachers. Teaching experience shows  $F = 0.30149$  and  $p = 0.740887$ , while level of teaching has  $F = 0.600219$  and  $p = 0.552122$ , both confirming non-significant differences. Since all p-values are greater than 0.05, it can be concluded that in-service teachers' perceptions remain consistent regardless of demographic variations.

## VIII. Discussion

The findings of the present study indicate that in-service teachers have a moderate to fairly high level of perception regarding the challenges involved in developing relational capacity among adolescents with intellectual disabilities. The mean perception score of 62.43 out of 100 suggests that teachers are aware of the social, emotional, behavioural, communicative, and institutional challenges that influence relational development. This finding is important because relational capacity is not limited to simple social interaction; it includes the ability to develop trust, express emotions, communicate with others, participate with peers, and experience a sense of belonging.



The result supports the view that adolescents with intellectual disabilities possess relational and emotional potential, but this potential requires appropriate support from teachers and the school environment. Gavron et al. (2022) emphasized that adolescents with intellectual disabilities demonstrate collaboration, responsiveness, and mutual attunement when they are provided with supportive relational contexts. Similarly, Girgis and Paparo et al. (2025) noted that emotional regulation and relational development are shaped through consistent and meaningful interactions. Therefore, the perception of teachers becomes highly significant because their beliefs and classroom responses can either support or restrict students' relational growth.

The findings also show that in-service teachers recognize the challenges associated with communication, emotional regulation, behavioural difficulties, peer interaction, and institutional limitations. These challenges are consistent with earlier studies which reported that teachers often experience difficulty in supporting students with intellectual disabilities due to limited resources, insufficient training, and lack of specialized strategies. Alshamri (2020) found that teachers working in inclusive classrooms faced challenges related to inadequate training, limited resources, and uncertainty in supporting the emotional and relational needs of students with intellectual disabilities. Barr and Mavropoulou (2019) also observed that even teachers with positive intentions may struggle to adapt instruction and maintain student engagement when students experience communication and behavioural challenges.

The moderate to fairly high perception score may be explained by the direct classroom experience of in-service teachers. Unlike pre-service teachers, in-service teachers work regularly with students, families, peer groups, and school systems. Their practical exposure may help them understand the real barriers that affect relational capacity. Sigstad (2018) emphasized that teachers play a mediating role in fostering peer relationships among students with intellectual disabilities. Teachers who actively create opportunities for peer interaction, cooperative learning, and classroom participation can help students develop social confidence and belonging. Similarly, Matsushima and Kato (2015) identified empathy, responsiveness, and mutual respect as essential qualities in teacher-student relationships involving children with intellectual disabilities.

The study further found no significant difference in the perception scores of in-service teachers with reference to selected demographic variables such as gender, age, type of school, educational qualification, professional qualification, nature of school, locality, teaching experience, and level of teaching. This indicates that the perceptions of teachers were broadly similar across different demographic backgrounds. The absence of significant differences suggests that challenges in developing relational capacity are commonly experienced by in-service teachers across educational settings. These challenges may be linked more strongly to the nature of teaching adolescents with intellectual disabilities than to the personal or institutional background of the teacher. This finding has practical importance. It suggests that all in-service teachers, irrespective of demographic background, may require professional support in the area of relational development. Arcangeli et al. (2020) found that teachers with greater exposure and training tend to demonstrate more positive attitudes towards students with intellectual disabilities. Hassanein (2015) also reported that structured professional



development, direct interaction, and empathy-based training can improve teachers' attitudes and reduce misconceptions. Therefore, although the present study did not find significant demographic differences, it reinforces the need for general professional development programmes for all teachers working with adolescents with intellectual disabilities.

The findings also align with the idea that inclusion should be understood as a relational process rather than only as physical placement in a classroom. Wiesel and Bigby et al. (2024) argued that inclusion becomes meaningful only when individuals with intellectual disabilities are able to participate in reciprocal relationships and social environments. Dalkilic and Vadeboncoeur (2016) similarly explained that inclusive education should focus on relational inclusion, where learners are supported to participate as valued members of the classroom community. In this context, the role of teachers is central because they organize classroom interaction, support peer acceptance, and create opportunities for social participation.

Another important implication of the findings is that teacher training should include emotional and relational dimensions of inclusive education. Vovchenko (2021) found that teachers' emotional intelligence influences the emotional development of adolescents with intellectual disabilities. Teachers with stronger emotional awareness may be better able to understand students' behaviours as forms of communication and respond with patience and empathy. Halpern and Owen (2021) also emphasized the importance of scaffolding autonomy, where individuals with intellectual disabilities are supported to make decisions and participate meaningfully while still receiving guidance. Such approaches are necessary for strengthening relational capacity because they respect the agency and social potential of adolescents with intellectual disabilities. Overall, the discussion shows that in-service teachers recognize relational capacity as an important developmental area, but they also face several challenges in supporting it. The absence of significant differences across demographic variables suggests that relational challenges are shared across teacher groups. Therefore, schools and teacher education systems should provide continuous training, collaborative support, and practical classroom strategies to help teachers promote trust, communication, peer interaction, emotional expression, and belonging among adolescents with intellectual disabilities.

## **IX. Conclusion**

The present study examined the perceptions of in-service teachers towards the challenges involved in developing relational capacity among adolescents with intellectual disabilities. The study focused on two major objectives: first, to examine the mean perception of in-service teachers, and second, to compare their perceptions with reference to selected demographic variables. Based on the analysis, it was found that in-service teachers obtained a mean perception score of 62.43 out of 100, which indicates a moderate to fairly high level of awareness regarding the challenges associated with relational development.

The findings suggest that in-service teachers recognize the importance of relational capacity in the overall development of adolescents with intellectual disabilities.



Relational capacity is closely connected with communication, emotional expression, peer interaction, trust, empathy, and social participation. The study indicates that teachers understand that adolescents with intellectual disabilities may face challenges in these areas, but they also require appropriate classroom opportunities, emotional support, and structured guidance to develop meaningful relationships.

The study also found that there was no statistically significant difference in the perception scores of in-service teachers with reference to gender, type of school, age, educational qualification, professional qualification, nature of school, locality, teaching experience, and level of teaching. Therefore, the null hypothesis was accepted. This finding shows that the perceptions of in-service teachers were generally similar across demographic backgrounds. The challenges involved in developing relational capacity appear to be common professional concerns for teachers working with adolescents with intellectual disabilities.

These findings are consistent with the view that relational capacity develops through supportive environments and meaningful interaction. Previous studies have emphasized that individuals with intellectual disabilities possess emotional and relational abilities that can be strengthened through empathetic support, peer engagement, and teacher mediation (Gavron et al., 2022; Sigstad, 2018). The role of teachers is especially significant because their perceptions influence how students are included in classroom activities and peer relationships. Teachers who demonstrate empathy, responsiveness, and trust can help create relationally supportive classroom environments (Matsushima & Kato, 2015).

The study concludes that developing relational capacity among adolescents with intellectual disabilities should be treated as an important educational goal. Inclusion should not be limited to physical placement in classrooms; it should involve meaningful participation, emotional security, social interaction, and a sense of belonging. In-service teachers require continuous professional development, institutional support, and practical strategies to promote relational inclusion. Training programmes should focus on communication support, emotional regulation, peer-mediated activities, social skills instruction, and inclusive classroom practices.

Overall, the study highlights that in-service teachers are aware of the challenges involved in developing relational capacity, but they require stronger systemic and professional support to address these challenges effectively. Strengthening teachers' relational competence can contribute to more inclusive, empathetic, and socially responsive educational environments for adolescents with intellectual disabilities.

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