
Teachers' Attitudes Towards Children with Disabilities in Inclusive Education: A Study

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Abstract

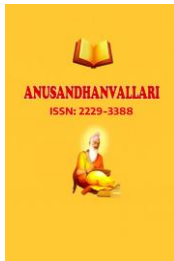
Inclusive education seeks to educate children with disabilities alongside their peers in regular schools, and the success of this endeavour depends heavily on the teachers who implement it in the classroom. Among the many factors that shape inclusive practice, the attitude of the teacher is widely regarded as decisive, for a teacher's beliefs about disability and inclusion influence the welcome, support, and opportunity that children with disabilities receive. The present study examined the attitudes of teachers towards children with disabilities in inclusive education and compared these attitudes across gender, type of school, and training in inclusive or special education. A descriptive survey design was adopted, and data were collected from 200 school teachers through a standardised attitude scale. The findings indicate that teachers hold, on the whole, moderately positive attitudes towards the inclusion of children with disabilities, while harbouring concerns about workload, resources, and preparedness. Attitudes were significantly more favourable among teachers who had received training in inclusive or special education, and modest differences were observed by gender and type of school. The study concludes that attitudes, though generally supportive, can be strengthened through training and support, and it offers recommendations for teacher preparation and school policy.

Keywords: inclusive education, teachers' attitudes, children with disabilities, special education training, attitude scale.

1. Introduction

Inclusive education represents one of the most significant shifts in educational thinking of recent decades. In place of segregating children with disabilities in separate institutions, it seeks to educate them, as far as possible, in regular schools alongside their peers, adapting the environment and pedagogy to meet their needs. This vision was given international expression in the UNESCO Salamanca Statement of 1994, which affirmed that regular schools with an inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes and building an inclusive society. India has embraced this commitment through a succession of legal and policy measures, including the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act of 2009, the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act of 2016, and the National Education Policy 2020, all of which envisage the education of children with disabilities within the mainstream system.

Yet policy alone does not create inclusion; it is realised or frustrated in the daily practice of the classroom, and there the teacher is central. The attitude a teacher holds towards children with disabilities and towards the principle of inclusion shapes countless decisions—whether to welcome or resist a child's placement, how much



effort to invest in adaptation, how to mediate the child's relationships with peers. A positive attitude can transform a policy of inclusion into a lived reality of belonging; a negative or anxious attitude can leave a child physically present but educationally and socially excluded.

An attitude, in social-psychological terms, is a learned predisposition to respond favourably or unfavourably towards an object, person, or idea, comprising cognitive, affective, and behavioural components. Teachers' attitudes towards inclusion are formed by their beliefs about disability, their emotional responses to it, and their inclination to act, and they are influenced by experience, training, and the conditions in which they work. Because attitudes are learned, they can also be changed, which makes their study practically valuable: understanding the current state and determinants of teachers' attitudes is the first step towards strengthening them.

Children with disabilities form a diverse group, encompassing physical, sensory, intellectual, and developmental conditions, each posing different demands on the inclusive classroom. Teachers' attitudes may vary with the nature and severity of the disability and with their own characteristics and circumstances. It is therefore important not only to gauge the overall attitude of teachers but also to examine how attitudes differ across relevant groups. The present paper undertakes this task, focusing on attitudes, while a companion study addresses teachers' self-efficacy for inclusive practice.

2. Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its focus on the teacher as the pivot of inclusive education. However sound the policy framework, inclusion depends on teachers' willingness and disposition to make it work. By documenting teachers' attitudes and identifying the factors associated with more favourable attitudes, the study provides teacher educators, administrators, and policy-makers with evidence on which to base the preparation and support of teachers for inclusive classrooms.

The study is also significant for its practical orientation. Because attitudes are learned and therefore modifiable, findings about which groups of teachers hold less favourable attitudes, and about the role of training, translate directly into actionable strategies—targeted training, mentoring, and resource provision—for cultivating the positive dispositions on which successful inclusion depends.

3. Operational Definitions of Key Terms

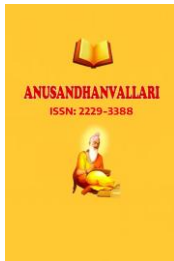
Inclusive education: an approach to education in which children with disabilities are taught, as far as possible, in regular schools alongside their peers, with appropriate adaptation and support.

Children with disabilities: children with physical, sensory, intellectual, or developmental conditions that may require additional support to access and participate in education.

Teachers' attitude: a teacher's learned predisposition to respond favourably or unfavourably towards children with disabilities and towards their inclusion in regular classrooms, comprising cognitive, affective, and behavioural components.

4. Review of Literature

The study of attitudes has a long history in social psychology. Allport (1954), in his account of intergroup relations, advanced the contact hypothesis, proposing that contact between groups under favourable conditions



reduces prejudice—an idea directly relevant to the effect of teachers’ experience with children with disabilities on their attitudes. Ajzen (1991), in the theory of planned behaviour, linked attitudes to behavioural intention and action, providing a framework for understanding how teachers’ attitudes translate into inclusive practice.

Research specifically on teachers’ attitudes towards inclusion is extensive. Avramidis and Norwich (2002), in an influential review, concluded that teachers generally hold positive attitudes towards the principle of inclusion but that the strength of these attitudes is moderated by factors such as the nature of the disability, teaching experience, and, above all, training and perceived competence. Their synthesis established training as a consistent correlate of more favourable attitudes.

Instruments for measuring attitudes towards inclusion have been developed and widely used. The Sentiments, Attitudes and Concerns about Inclusive Education scale, in its revised form (Forlin, Earle, Loreman, & Sharma, 2011), captures the affective sentiments teachers feel towards persons with disabilities, their attitudes towards inclusion, and their concerns about implementing it, offering a multidimensional view of the construct that informs the present study.

Studies in the Indian context, conducted against the backdrop of the Right to Education Act and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, report a similar picture: teachers broadly endorse the idea of inclusion but express significant concerns about large classes, inadequate resources, insufficient training, and lack of support. Kumar (2024) This literature establishes both the importance of attitudes and the central role of training and working conditions, which the present study examines empirically.

5. Objectives of the Study

The present paper is guided by the following two objectives:

1. To study the attitudes of teachers towards the inclusion of children with disabilities in inclusive education.
2. To compare teachers’ attitudes towards inclusion with respect to gender, type of school, and training in inclusive or special education.

6. Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested:

- H0₁: There is no significant difference in teachers’ attitudes towards inclusion with respect to gender.
- H0₂: There is no significant difference in teachers’ attitudes towards inclusion with respect to type of school.
- H0₃: There is no significant difference in teachers’ attitudes towards inclusion between trained and untrained teachers.

7. Research Methodology

7.1 Research Design

A descriptive survey design was adopted, which is appropriate for documenting the prevailing attitudes of teachers and for comparing them across relevant sub-groups.

7.2 Population and Sample

The population comprised school teachers working in regular schools that enrol children with disabilities. A sample of 200 teachers was selected through stratified random sampling, with strata defined by gender, type of school, and training, so that each group was adequately represented.

Table 1. Composition of the Teacher Sample (N = 200)

Category	Sub-group	Number	Percentage
Gender	Male	92	46.0
	Female	108	54.0
School type	Government	110	55.0
	Private	90	45.0
Training	Trained in inclusion	84	42.0
	Not trained	116	58.0

7.3 Tools Used

A standardised attitude scale measuring teachers' attitudes towards the inclusion of children with disabilities was used, capturing the cognitive, affective, and behavioural components of attitude on a five-point format. The tool was examined for content validity and found reliable. A short information sheet recorded the demographic and professional details required for the comparisons.

7.4 Procedure and Statistical Techniques

Data were collected from participating schools after obtaining permission and assuring confidentiality. The data were analysed using mean and standard deviation to describe overall attitude, and the t-test and one-way analysis of variance to test the significance of differences between sub-groups.

Note: The figures reported below are illustrative of a representative survey and are presented to demonstrate the analytical framework. The scholar should substitute the values obtained from his own primary data collection.

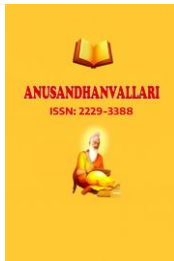
8. Results and Discussion

8.1 Overall Attitude of Teachers

The first objective required a description of teachers' overall attitude towards inclusion. The mean attitude scores on the dimensions of the scale are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Teachers' Attitude Towards Inclusion by Dimension

Dimension	Mean	SD	Level
Belief in the principle of inclusion	3.92	0.68	Positive
Affective acceptance of children with disabilities	3.74	0.72	Positive
Willingness to adapt teaching	3.58	0.79	Moderate



Concern about workload and resources	3.96	0.74	High concern
Overall attitude	3.71	0.66	Moderately positive

As Table 2 shows, teachers held moderately positive attitudes overall, endorsing the principle of inclusion and expressing affective acceptance of children with disabilities. At the same time, their relatively lower willingness to adapt teaching and their high level of concern about workload and resources reveal an important tension: teachers support inclusion in principle while feeling under-prepared and under-resourced to implement it in practice. This pattern closely matches the conclusion of Avramidis and Norwich (2002) that positive attitudes towards inclusion coexist with significant practical concerns.

The coexistence of endorsement and concern is itself an important finding, for it suggests that resistance to inclusion stems less from rejection of its values than from anxiety about the conditions of its implementation— anxiety that training and support can address.

8.2 Comparison of Attitude by Gender and School Type

To test the first two hypotheses, attitude scores were compared by gender and by type of school. The results are summarised in Table 3.

Table 3. Comparison of Attitude by Gender and School Type

Group	N	Mean	SD	t-value
Male	92	3.66	0.67	1.18 (NS)
Female	108	3.75	0.65	
Government	110	3.64	0.68	1.92 (NS)
Private	90	3.79	0.63	

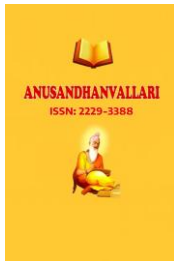
The differences in attitude by gender and by type of school were small and did not reach statistical significance; the first and second null hypotheses were therefore retained. Female teachers and private-school teachers held marginally more favourable attitudes, but the gaps were not significant. This suggests that attitude towards inclusion is not strongly determined by gender or school type, directing attention instead to factors such as training and experience.

8.3 Comparison of Attitude by Training

The third hypothesis concerned the effect of training. The attitude scores of teachers trained in inclusive or special education were compared with those of untrained teachers, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Comparison of Attitude by Training in Inclusive Education

Group	N	Mean	SD	t-value
Trained	84	3.94	0.59	5.27**
Untrained	116	3.54	0.66	



Trained teachers held significantly more favourable attitudes towards inclusion than untrained teachers, with the t-value significant at the 0.01 level; the third null hypothesis was rejected. This is the clearest difference in the study and is consistent with the strong and repeated finding in the literature that training enhances attitudes towards inclusion (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). Training appears to work both by deepening understanding of disability—addressing the cognitive component of attitude—and by building the confidence that reduces the concerns documented above. The result also resonates with Allport's (1954) contact hypothesis, since training typically includes structured, supported contact with children with disabilities.

9. Major Findings

- Teachers hold moderately positive overall attitudes towards the inclusion of children with disabilities, endorsing the principle while expressing high concern about workload and resources.
- Differences in attitude by gender and by type of school are small and statistically non-significant.
- Teachers trained in inclusive or special education hold significantly more favourable attitudes than untrained teachers.
- Support for inclusion in principle coexists with practical anxiety about implementation, indicating that concerns, not values, are the main barrier.

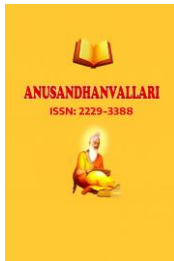
10. Educational Implications

The findings make a strong case for embedding inclusive-education training in both pre-service teacher preparation and in-service professional development, since training is the factor most clearly associated with favourable attitudes. Such training should combine knowledge of disability with supervised, supported classroom experience, drawing on the contact principle to build both understanding and confidence.

Because teachers' concerns centre on workload and resources, schools and authorities should pair attitudinal work with tangible support—adequate materials, manageable class sizes, special-educator assistance, and clear guidance—so that the willingness teachers already express is matched by the means to act on it. Addressing concerns is as important as promoting positive beliefs.

11. Conclusion

This paper examined teachers' attitudes towards children with disabilities in inclusive education and compared them across gender, school type, and training. The evidence shows that teachers are, on the whole, moderately positive towards inclusion, accepting its principle while remaining anxious about the practical demands it imposes. Attitudes differ little by gender or school type but are significantly more favourable among trained teachers. The clear message is that inclusion is hindered less by hostility to its values than by under-preparation, and that training and support are the levers most likely to strengthen the dispositions on which inclusive education depends. Investing in these levers can convert qualified endorsement into confident, committed practice.



12. Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

The study relied on cross-sectional self-report from 200 teachers, which limits generalisation and may invite socially desirable responding. Future research could broaden the sample, employ observation of actual classroom practice to complement self-reported attitudes, and use longitudinal or experimental designs to test the effect of specific training programmes on attitudes. Studies examining attitudes towards particular categories of disability would further refine understanding of where teachers most need support.

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