

Teacher Attitudes and Their Impact on Inclusion of Students with Learning Disabilities in Mainstream Schools

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Abstract: *Inclusive education is influenced by teachers' attitudes, professional confidence, and the support available within schools. This cross-sectional questionnaire study examined relationships among attitudes toward inclusion, inclusive practices and self-efficacy, perceived school support, work engagement, and teacher stress among 201 practising educators. The five measured domains demonstrated acceptable reliability. Teachers reported moderately positive attitudes toward inclusion, relatively strong inclusive practices and self-efficacy, and high work engagement. Attitudes were strongly related to inclusive practices and self-efficacy and to perceived school support. Training status was significantly associated with all five domains. Multiple regression indicated that attitudes, perceived school support, and work engagement significantly predicted inclusive practices and self-efficacy, with an adjusted R-squared of .734. The findings indicate that positive teacher attitudes are important but should be supported by appropriate professional preparation, institutional resources, collaboration, and manageable workloads to promote effective inclusion of students with learning disabilities.*

Keywords: inclusive education, learning disabilities, teacher attitudes, teacher self-efficacy, school support, teacher training

1. Introduction

Inclusive education aims to overcome barriers to learners' presence, participation and achievement within education systems (UNESCO, 2017). For students with learning disabilities, placement in a mainstream classroom alone does not guarantee meaningful participation, access to instruction, social belonging or academic progress.

Teacher attitudes are important because teachers' acceptance of inclusion and the availability of physical and human support are associated with inclusive practice (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). Self-efficacy and perceived school support are also closely linked to attitudes toward inclusion (Werner et al., 2021). Teachers therefore work within organisational systems in which professional confidence, training, resources and support may shape their capacity to translate favourable attitudes into practice.

The present study was situated in the semi-urban educational context of Theni and examined teacher-level and school-level factors together. The central purpose was to understand how attitudes toward inclusion relate to inclusive classroom practices/self-efficacy and whether perceived school support, work engagement, training and selected demographic characteristics are associated with inclusive functioning.

2. Methodology

Research design and participants

The empirical study used a non-experimental, cross-sectional questionnaire design. The final sample comprised 201 practising educators. Purposeful and snowball sampling were used through accessible educational networks. Because the sample was non-probability based, the findings represent the participating educators and should not be treated as population estimates for all teachers.

Instrument

The questionnaire was developed by the researcher specifically for this study. It assessed five domains: Attitudes toward Inclusion (Items 11-24), Inclusive Practices/Self-Efficacy (Items 25-35), Perceived School Support (Items 36-45), Work Engagement and Motivation (Items 46-53), and Teacher Stress and Overwhelm (Items 54-63), together with demographic, training, experience and applied categorical items. Composite scores were calculated as mean ratings on a 1-5 scale. No separate formal content-validation procedure was documented; internal consistency was therefore evaluated empirically using Cronbach's alpha.

Reliability, ethics and analysis. Cronbach's alpha values were .856 for attitudes, .817 for inclusive practices/self-efficacy, .790 for school support, .786 for work engagement and .796 for stress. Permission was obtained from participating schools and informed consent was obtained from participants; participation was voluntary and responses were treated confidentially. No separate formal institutional ethics approval or approval identifier was obtained. Analysis included descriptive statistics, normality assessment, Pearson correlations, one-way ANOVA with Tukey post-hoc comparisons, an independent-samples t-test, group comparisons and multiple linear regression.

3. Results

Sample profile. Of the 201 educators, 54.7% were female, 37.8% male and 7.5% preferred not to disclose gender. CBSE teachers represented 50.7% of the sample. Regarding inclusive-education training, 28.9% reported no formal training, 41.8% some training and 29.4% formal training.

Construct	Mean	SD
Work engagement & motivation	3.97	0.45
Inclusive practices/self-efficacy	3.68	0.42
Attitudes toward inclusion	3.62	0.43
Teacher stress & overwhelm	3.58	0.44
Perceived school support	3.52	0.43

Descriptive Findings

Work engagement was the highest-scoring construct, followed by inclusive practices/self-efficacy and attitudes. The simultaneous presence of high engagement and a relatively high stress score suggests that professional commitment can coexist with workload pressure.

Correlations

Significant positive relationships were reported among all five constructs ($p < .001$). Attitudes were strongly correlated with inclusive practices/self-efficacy ($r = .812$) and perceived school support ($r = .827$). Work engagement correlated with attitudes ($r = .794$) and self-efficacy/practices ($r = .792$). These associations indicate that favourable beliefs, confidence, engagement and perceived institutional support tend to occur together, although the cross-sectional design does not establish causality.

Training and demographic comparisons. Training status was significantly associated with all five domains. Attitude scores increased from $M = 3.39$ among teachers with no formal training to 3.60 among those with some training and 3.85 among formally trained teachers, $F = 19.94$, $p < .001$. Self-efficacy/practices similarly increased from 3.42 to 3.69 and 3.90, $F = 23.16$, $p < .001$. Gender did not significantly differentiate attitudes, and school-board affiliation did not significantly differentiate attitudes or self-efficacy. Teaching experience significantly influenced self-efficacy, $F(4,196) = 2.960$, $p = .021$.

Regression. Inclusive Practices/Self-Efficacy was regressed on Attitudes toward Inclusion, Perceived School Support and Work Engagement. All three predictors were significant: attitudes ($\beta = .340$, $p < .001$), work engagement ($\beta = .319$, $p < .001$) and school support ($\beta = .266$, $p < .001$). The overall model was significant, $F(3,197) = 185.3$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .738$, adjusted $R^2 = .734$. Thus, the three predictors together accounted for 73.4% of adjusted variance in inclusive practices/self-efficacy.

4. Discussion

The findings support an integrated view of inclusion in which teacher psychology and school structures interact. Positive attitudes were closely related to teachers' confidence and reported inclusive practices, while school support and professional engagement made independent contributions. This pattern is consistent with evidence linking school support and self-efficacy to teachers' attitudes toward inclusion (Werner et al., 2021).

Training emerged as a clear practical finding. Formally trained teachers reported higher attitudes and self-efficacy than untrained or partially trained educators. This supports the value of professional development that builds practical competence rather than awareness alone; recent research

similarly links professional development with stronger self-efficacy and inclusive practice (Woodcock et al., 2022).

The coexistence of strong engagement and notable stress also deserves attention. The positive association between engagement and stress should not be interpreted as evidence that stress is beneficial. Rather, highly involved teachers may experience greater demands while attempting to respond to diverse needs. School leaders therefore need to support commitment through adequate planning time, resources and specialist assistance rather than allowing inclusion to become an additional unsupported responsibility.

The absence of significant gender and school-board differences suggests that these demographic characteristics were less informative than professional preparation and practical experience in this sample. The findings also reinforce the importance of viewing inclusive education as a shared responsibility involving teachers, school leadership, parents, peers and specialist professionals.

5. Practical Implications

Schools should provide regular skill-focused professional development on learning disabilities, differentiated instruction, Universal Design for Learning, classroom accommodations and positive behaviour support. Teachers also need adapted teaching materials, co-planning time and access to special educators, counsellors or other specialists. Parent-teacher collaboration and positive peer interaction should be deliberately strengthened. Because large classes, limited time and workload pressure were identified as barriers, teacher wellbeing and workload allocation should form part of inclusion planning.

6. Conclusion

The findings indicate that positive teacher attitudes are an important component of effective inclusion but are insufficient without appropriate school-level support. Among the 201 educators studied, attitudes toward inclusion, perceived school support, and work engagement were significant predictors of inclusive practices and self-efficacy, while formal inclusive-education training was associated with stronger outcomes across the measured domains. These results highlight the value of combining teacher preparation with adequate resources, manageable workloads, and collaborative support. Such conditions may help teachers translate favourable attitudes into meaningful inclusive practices for students with learning disabilities.

7. Limitations and Future Directions

The study was cross-sectional and used non-probability sampling and self-reported teacher responses; therefore, causal conclusions and broad generalisation are not warranted. Future research may use larger probability-based samples, direct classroom observations and longitudinal designs, and may examine student outcomes alongside teacher-reported variables.

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