

Awareness, Attitudes, and Perceived Support for Autism-Inclusive Education: Perspectives of Indian Parents and Teachers

Swetha M¹, Dr. Richa Gupta²

¹MSc Psychology, Postgraduate Student, Center for Distance and Online Education, JAIN (Deemed-to-be University), Bengaluru, India

²Research Guide, JAIN (Deemed-to-be University), Bengaluru, India

Abstract: Background: The goal of Indian policy is to educate children with disabilities in mainstream classrooms, which hinges on the awareness, attitudes and perceived institutional support of parents and teachers, especially when it comes to those with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Till now these three variables have not been studied together in the Indian context, and neither of them has been studied from both stakeholder groups' perspective. Participants: 100 Indian respondents (50 parents of autistic children and 50 school teachers) completed a descriptive, cross sectional survey consisting of a demographic sheet, an Autism Awareness Questionnaire, an Attitude toward Inclusive Education Scale and two open-ended items; all the scales were found to have excellent internal consistencies ($\alpha \geq .94$). Results: There was a strong and positive correlation between awareness and attitude towards inclusion among all participants ($r(29) = 0.73, p < .001$), as well as for the individual groups of parents ($r(18) = 0.70, p < .001$) and teachers ($r(10) = 0.90, p < .001$). There was no significant difference between the awareness scores for parents and teachers ($t(29) = 0.64, p = .533$) and between the awareness scores of trained and untrained teachers ($t(10) = -0.25, p = .806$) although the latter comparison was underpowered. There was no significant correlation between perceived educational support and attitude when considered overall, $r(29) = .31, p = .089$. Teacher training, extra special education staff, and awareness building were the top three recommended improvements identified independently by the qualitative responses. Conclusions: This is the variable most strongly correlated with favourable attitudes toward inclusion and the roles of teacher training and the provision of structural support are still questions that require larger, well powered research.

Keywords: Autism Spectrum Disorder; inclusive education; teacher attitudes; parental awareness; educational support; India

1. Introduction

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a life-long neurodevelopmental disorder marked by sustained difficulties with social communication and by repetitive patterns of behavior and interests that are limited or atypical (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2013). The prevalence rate of 1 in 100 children has been estimated globally (World Health Organization [WHO], 2023), although it is believed that the Indian prevalence rate may be underestimated due to inconsistent screening and lack of awareness among frontline health and education workers (Chauhan et al., 2019). The exact number is not known, but millions and thousands of Indian children will need some educational accommodation due to autism, and the vast majority of these children will, if in school, be in a mainstream school and not a specialised school.

The legislative framework in India has shifted strongly to mainstream inclusion of children with disabilities as this is the norm. The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (Government of India, 2016) explicitly identified ASD as a "specified disability" and mandated reasonable accommodation and provision of resources, and the National Education Policy (Ministry of Education, 2020) reiterated this and emphasized the need for improved training of special educators embedded in general education. They also reflect the consensus that exists internationally, as outlined in the Salamanca Statement by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 1994), that inclusive classrooms are the most effective way of educating children with disabilities with their peers. Independent studies of how this policy is actually implemented, however, still

show that there are significant discrepancies between the policy and its practice in normal Indian classrooms (Kaur, 2025).

Parents and teachers are the two groups with the closest stake in the child and play a critical role in the success of inclusion. There is a long history of research globally that links teacher training and self-efficacy to more positive attitudes towards inclusive practice (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Sharma, Forlin, & Loreman, 2008; Sharma, Loreman, & Forlin, 2012), and recent studies specifically on autism have shown that prior autism-specific training to be the strongest predictor of knowledge and attitude among teachers (Allassaf, 2025). Qualitative research within India has identified large classroom size, often the absence of special educators, and lack of adequate pre-service education as the main obstacles to inclusive education despite teachers' positive attitude towards inclusive education (Kaur, 2025). Despite parents having the first point of contact with any developmental difference and being the most consistent advocates for their child's education, Indian parents were found to be somewhat oblivious of early signs of behavior of autism (Venkatesan, 2018) and have significant unmet information and service needs (Divan, Vajaratkar, Desai, Strik-Lievers, & Patel, 2019). In spite of all this literature, very few studies in India have explored autism awareness, attitude towards inclusion and perceived educational support simultaneously in a single study, directly comparing parents and teachers; and most of the studies conducted in India have focused on either parents or teachers alone (Venkatesan, 2018; Divan et al., 2019), and recent narrative reviews of Indian literature have pointed out that the integration of these three is a specific gap (Srivastava, Srivastava, Dubey, & Srivastava, 2024). Considering these

Volume 15 Issue 10, October 2026

Fully Refereed | Open Access | Double Blind Peer Reviewed Journal

www.ijsr.net

two groups together in the same measurement framework is the only way to provide evidence that child inclusion in daily practice is effective; studying either group alone will not be sufficient. The present study was designed to answer the following questions: (a) Do parents' awareness about autism differ from teachers' awareness of autism? (b) Do teachers with autism specific training report more positive attitudes toward inclusion than those without autism-specific training? (c) Is there a positive association between teachers' awareness about autism and attitude toward inclusion? (d) Is there a positive association between teachers' perceived adequacy of educational support and attitude toward inclusion?

2. Method

2.1 Design and Participants

The design of the study was descriptive and cross sectional. The study design was descriptive and cross sectional. The participants were recruited by convenience and purposive (snowball) sampling and a structured questionnaire was built and administered as an online form, which was widely disseminated through parent-support networks, contacts in inclusive schools and social media. The final sample, following data cleaning, consisted of $N = 100$; 50 parents of a school-aged child diagnosed with ASD and 50 current teachers working in schools. In both groups, the majority of respondents were female (84% of parents and 66% of teachers) and most of them had a post-graduate qualification. Of the 50 parents, 16 (36%) and 33 (66%) teachers stated that they had received autism-related training; 38 of the 33 teachers who stated that they had received autism-related training were not trained in the area of autism.

2.2 Measures

The researcher-created questionnaires were given and each had five-point Likert scale responses (Strongly Disagree = 1, Strongly Agree = 5), along with a demographic questionnaire. The 11 item Autism Awareness Questionnaires (AAQ) totalled 11–55 and a higher score represented a higher factual knowledge of autism (Cronbach's $\alpha = .94$). The total score of the 12 items, content of which was taken from the cognitive-affective-behavioural structure proposed by Mahat (2008), ranged from 12 to 60, with higher scores indicating more positive attitudes toward mainstreaming children with autism ($\alpha = .95$). The Educational Support Checklist had a sum of scores of 12–60, with higher scores reflecting higher levels of perceived adequacy of school-based support (including special educators, individual planning, resources), and with an alpha of .95. Two open-ended items were used to elicit participants' descriptions of the main issues that children with autism encounter in inclusive schools and the changes they would suggest.

2.3 Procedure

All data were obtained online throughout several weeks. The form began with a statement of purpose and contained an embedded consent item to which the respondents had to respond before continuing. The form was opened with a statement of purpose and an embedded consent item which the respondents were required to respond to before continuing. The respondents then filled out the demographic sheet and the three scales and the two open-ended items independently and at their own speed.

2.4 Data Analysis

The data were analysed using SPSS. Independent-samples *t*-tests were used for the group comparisons, and Mann–Whitney *U* tests were performed in addition to each *t*-test; each Mann–Whitney *U* test supported the parametric test result, and all Shapiro–Wilk tests indicated that departures from normality were found. Pearson product-moment correlations were used to test for associations between continuous variables, and Spearman's rank-order correlation was used as a robustness check. Throughout all the analyses an alpha level of .05 (two-tailed) was used. Descriptive content analysis of open-ended responses, based on keywords, was conducted.

3. Results

3.1 Sample Characteristics and Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 summarises the demographic composition of the sample and Table 2 the descriptive statistics for the three study variables. Across the full sample, mean scores on all three measures fell in the upper half of their possible range, indicating a generally knowledgeable, favourably disposed sample- a pattern that should be read in light of the self-selected, digitally recruited nature of the sample. One teacher respondent scored at or near the floor on all three measures (Awareness = 11, Attitude = 12, Support = 12); this respondent's disproportionate influence on one subgroup correlation is addressed in Section 3.3.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Sample ($N = 100$)

Characteristic	Parents ($n = 50$)	Teachers ($n = 50$)
Female, n (%)	42 (84%)	33 (66%)
Postgraduate qualification or higher, n (%)	31 (62%)	41 (82%)
Self-rated familiarity with ASD, n (%)	45 (90%)	46 (92%)
Received autism-related training, n (%)	16 (36%)	33 (66%)

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Awareness, Attitude, and Support Scores by Group ($N = 100$)

Variable	Group	M	SD	Min	Max
Autism Awareness (range 11–55)	Parents	45.84	7.64	23	55
	Teachers	43.33	12.23	11	55
Attitude toward Inclusion (range 12–60)	Parents	46.95	9.47	25	59
	Teachers	47.33	13.03	12	60
Perceived Support (range 12–60)	Parents	40.21	12.69	19	60
	Teachers	39.42	10.7	12	50

3.2 Group Differences in Awareness and Attitude

Parents ($M = 45.84$, $SD = 7.64$) and teachers ($M = 43.33$, $SD = 12.23$) did not differ significantly in autism awareness, $t(29) = 0.64$, $p = .533$, $d = 0.26$; the non-parametric check agreed, $U = 119.0$, $p = .855$. Both groups showed comparably high, and comparably variable, self-reported awareness, with the point estimate slightly favouring parents rather than teachers — the opposite direction to that reported in some prior research (e.g., Alassaf, 2025).

Among teachers, attitude toward inclusion did not differ

Table 3: Independent-Samples t-Test Comparisons for Awareness and Attitude

Comparison	Group 1 M (SD)	Group 2 M (SD)	t	df	p	d
Awareness: Parents vs. Teachers	45.84 (7.64)	43.33 (12.23)	0.64	29	0.533	0.26
Attitude: Trained vs. Untrained Teachers	46.75 (15.28)	48.50 (8.66)	-0.25	10	0.806	-0.13

Note. Mann–Whitney U tests corroborated both comparisons (Awareness: $U = 119.0$, $p = .855$; Attitude: $U = 19.5$, $p = .607$).

3.3 Relationships among Awareness, Attitude, and Perceived Support

Autism awareness and attitude toward inclusion were strongly and positively correlated across the full sample, $r(29) = .73$, $p < .001$; Spearman's $\rho = .47$, $p = .007$ corroborated the direction and significance of this relationship. The association held when parents and teachers were examined separately (parents: $r = .70$, $p = .001$; teachers: $r = .78$, $p = .003$), indicating a genuine, cross-group pattern rather than an artefact of pooling two distinct groups.

Perceived educational support was not significantly correlated with attitude across the full sample, $r(29) = .31$, $p = .089$; Spearman's $\rho = .12$, $p = .538$. Disaggregating by group showed this null result concealed a divergent pattern: the support–attitude correlation was essentially zero among parents ($r = .02$, $p = .946$) but appeared strong among teachers ($r = .75$, $p = .005$). Given the modest teacher subsample, this correlation was checked for undue influence by the single low-scoring outlier described in Section 3.1; removing this one respondent reduced the teacher-only correlation from $r = .75$ to $r = .20$, $p = .562$. The apparent support–attitude link among teachers is therefore best regarded as an artefact of one extreme case rather than a robust, generalisable relationship. An exploratory correlation, not part of the a priori hypotheses, showed that awareness and perceived support were themselves significantly and positively correlated, $r(29) = .41$, $p = .024$.

Table 4: Pearson Correlations among Awareness, Attitude, and Perceived Support

Variable pair	Full sample (N = 100)	Parents (n = 50)	Teachers (n = 50)
Awareness × Attitude	$r = .73^{***}$	$r = .70^{**}$	$r = .78^{**}$
Support × Attitude	$r = .31$	$r = .02$	$r = .75^{**}$ ($r = .20$, ns, with outlier removed)
Awareness × Support	$r = .41^*$	—	—

Note. $^*p < .05$. $^{**}p < .01$. $^{***}p < .001$. ns = not statistically significant.

significantly between those with ($n = 38$) and without ($n = 12$) autism-related training when data were complete for both scales, $t(10) = -0.25$, $p = .806$, $d = -0.13$; the non parametric check agreed, $U = 19.5$, $p = .607$. This comparison rested on only 8 trained and 4 untrained teachers with complete data on both variables and was therefore severely underpowered: a true medium-to-large training effect, of the kind documented in prior research (Sharma et al., 2008; Alassaf, 2025), could easily fail to reach significance in a sample this small. This result is best read as inconclusive rather than as evidence that training does not shape attitude.

3.4 Qualitative Findings: Challenges and Recommended Improvements

All 100 respondents answered both open-ended items. The most frequently cited challenges were bullying or social exclusion by peers, a lack of trained or classroom-ready teachers, and difficulty forming friendships (each cited by 20% of respondents), followed by core communication difficulties (16%) and large class sizes (12%). The most frequently recommended improvement was teacher training or capacity-building, cited by 36% of respondents—more than any other theme—followed by calls for additional special educators or support staff (26%) and peer and parent-awareness programmes (26%). One parent described schools that “only have a special educator and call themselves inclusive... they rarely have any infrastructure to help the kids,” while a teacher observed that children are “often bullied by their peers.” Teacher training's status as the single most-cited recommendation directly corroborates, from an open-ended and unprompted angle, the centrality of teacher preparedness that runs through the international and Indian literature (Sharma et al., 2008; Kaur, 2025), even though this study's own quantitative test of the training–attitude link (Section 3.2) could not be confirmed with the available subsample.

Table 5: Most Frequently Reported Challenges and Recommended Improvements (N = 100)

Most-cited challenges	%	Most-cited recommended improvements	%
Bullying / social exclusion by peers	20	Teacher training / capacity building	36
Lack of trained or classroom-ready teachers	20	More special educators / support staff	26
Difficulty forming friendships	20	Peer and parent awareness programmes	26
Core communication difficulties	16	Individualised education plans	20
Large class sizes / limited individual attention	12	Shadow-teacher policy reform	13

4. Discussion

The main finding of this study is that the relationship between autism awareness and attitude toward inclusive education is

strong, statistically sound, and cross-group – with respondents who felt more accurate about the facts of autism also expressing more positive attitudes towards inclusive education of children with autism with typical peers, whether parents or teachers. This finding is consistent with the wider literature which found a relationship between awareness-raising and a decrease in the apprehension of disabled people towards their inclusion (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002) and with the qualitative data, where the respondents themselves volunteered awareness-raising as one of the top priorities to be addressed, along with teacher training.

A second two results make for a more complicated story and should not be taken lightly. It is worth noting that there was no difference between parents and teachers in terms of overall autism awareness, and that there is a natural assumption that those who work with children would be more likely to be familiar with autism, given that the development of parental awareness of autism could also be shaped by the parent's cultural interpretations and lived experience of autism; in this mainly urban, digitally connected, and already autism-aware sample the baseline knowledge of both parents and teachers may have been equally high, and this could also result from being exposed to the condition through formal training. Second, because the sample size for the training-attitude comparison was small (8 trained teachers, 4 trained teachers with complete data), it would be difficult to draw any conclusions other than a very large one, and the qualitative data confirmed that training was the most independent recommendation among teachers for strengthening inclusion, as well as prior research indicating that teachers' training was the strongest predictor of knowledge and attitude (Alassaf, 2025; Sharma et al., 2008).

The finding of perceived support is more informative than simply a null finding. The overall correlation between perceived support and attitude was very modest, and within this group, almost entirely due to the teacher subgroup, of which the correlation with attitude was almost entirely due to a single respondent who scored low. This does not imply that there is no relationship between institutional support and teacher confidence, or between family perceived benefit of inclusion and institutional support, as found in the wider literature (Eldar, Talmor, & Wolf-Zukerman, 2010; Simón, Martínez-Rico, McWilliam, & Cañadas, 2023), rather, it suggests that the present modest sample might not have been able to detect such a relationship reliably. Considering the qualitative themes which emerged and were most frequently and spontaneously suggested by respondents, it is reasonable to believe that the structural-support hypothesis is a potential factor in shaping positive attitudes to inclusion in Indian schools that has yet to be tested.

4.1 Practical Implications

Three practical implications follow from this pattern of results. First, because awareness was the one variable reliably linked to favourable attitudes across both stakeholder groups, structured psychoeducation for parents and in service training for teachers- delivered jointly where feasible- represents a comparatively low-cost, evidence consistent lever for shifting attitudes toward inclusion. Second, the qualitative data's emphasis on teacher training and additional special-education

staffing suggests that resource allocation under existing schemes such as Samagra Shiksha should prioritise these areas specifically, rather than treating “inclusive education” as adequately addressed by physical placement alone. Third, the disagreement visible in respondents' own accounts of the shadow-teacher system- over who should fund and control this provision- points to a concrete, actionable gap in current school policy that schools and administrators could address through clearer, more transparent guidelines.

4.2 Limitations

The principal limitation of this study is its modest, non-probability sample, which constrains statistical power for the training-status comparison specifically and limits the generalisability of all findings to the broader, more geographically and digitally diverse population of Indian parents and teachers. Reliance on self-report measures also raises the possibility of social-desirability bias, particularly for the attitude scale, and the cross-sectional design precludes causal interpretation of the awareness-attitude association.

5. Conclusion

In this sample of 100 Indian parents and teachers, autism awareness was strongly and consistently associated with more favourable attitudes toward inclusive education, while group differences in awareness and the roles of teacher training and perceived school support in shaping attitude could not be confirmed with the available sample. Qualitative responses independently reinforced the importance of teacher training, additional special-education resources, and awareness-building. Strengthening autism awareness among both parents and teachers, alongside continued investment in structured teacher training, appears to be a practical and evidence-consistent lever for improving attitudes toward inclusion in Indian schools; larger, adequately powered studies are needed to confirm whether training and structural support shape attitudes as reliably as awareness does.

References

- [1] Alassaf, M. A. (2025). Teachers' knowledge and attitudes toward inclusive education for children with autism in mainstream schools. *Frontiers in Education*, 10, Article 1630710. <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2025.1630710>
- [2] American Psychiatric Association. (2013). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (5th ed.). <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.books.9780890425596>
- [3] Avramidis, E., & Norwich, B. (2002). Teachers' attitudes towards integration/inclusion: A review of the literature. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 17(2), 129–147. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08856250210129056>
- [4] Chauhan, A., Sahu, J. K., Jaiswal, N., Kumar, K., Agarwal, A., Kaur, J., ... & Singh, M. (2019). Prevalence of autism spectrum disorder in Indian children: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Neurology India*, 67(1), 100–104.
- [5] Divan, G., Vajaratkar, V., Desai, M. U., Strik-Lievers, L., & Patel, V. (2012). Challenges, Coping Strategies, and Unmet Needs of Families with a Child with Autism

- Spectrum Disorder in Goa, India. *Autism Research*, 5(3), 190-200. sheets/detail/autism-spectrum-disorders
- [6] Eldar, E., Talmor, R., & Wolf-Zukerman, T. (2010). Successes and difficulties in the individual inclusion of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in the eyes of their coordinators. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 14(1), 97–114. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603110802504150>
- [7] Government of India. (2016). The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016. Ministry of Law and Justice. <https://legislative.gov.in/>
- [8] Kaur, R., & Salian, R. H. (2025). Teacher perspectives and barriers in implementing inclusive education for Indian children with special needs: A pilot study. *British Journal of Special Education*, 52(1), 4-17.
- [9] Mahat, M. (2008). The development of a psychometrically-sound instrument to measure teachers' multidimensional attitudes toward inclusive education. *International Journal of Special Education*, 23(1), 82–92.
- [10] Ministry of Education. (2020). National Education Policy 2020. Government of India. <https://www.education.gov.in/>
- [11] Venkatesan, S. (2018). Behavioral Approach to Speech, Language, Hearing, and Communication Disorders. In the *Handbook of Research on Psychosocial Perspectives of Human Communication Disorders* (pp. 209-232). IGI Global Scientific Publishing
- [12] Sharma, U., Forlin, C., & Loreman, T. (2008). Impact of training on pre-service teachers' attitudes and concerns about inclusive education and sentiments about persons with disabilities. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 24(2), 773–785. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2007.09.003>
- [13] Sharma, U., Loreman, T., & Forlin, C. (2012). Measuring teacher efficacy to implement inclusive practices. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, 12(1), 12–21. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-3802.2011.01200.x>
- [14] Simón, C., Martínez-Rico, G., McWilliam, R. A., & Cañadas, M. (2023). Attitudes toward inclusion and benefits perceived by families in schools with students with autism spectrum disorders. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 53(7), 2689–2702. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-022-05491-5>
- [15] Srivastava, M., Srivastava, P., Dubey, A. K., & Srivastava, P. (2024). A narrative review of autism spectrum disorder in the Indian context. *Journal of Indian Association for Child and Adolescent Mental Health*, 19(4), 336–343. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09731342231223589>
- [16] United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. (1994). The Salamanca Statement and framework for action on special needs education.
- [17] Vats, T., Sinha, A. K., & Arun, P. (2024). Exploring the intersections of cultural constructs and parental beliefs: Autism spectrum disorder in Indian families. *Journal of Indian Association for Child and Adolescent Mental Health*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0972558X241260830>
- [18] World Health Organization. (2023). Autism spectrum disorders. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact>