
Teachers' Attitudes Towards the Inclusion of Children with Special Educational Needs in Inclusive Classrooms: A Literature Review

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Received: 06 Feb 2026, Received in revised form: 04 Mar 2026, Accepted: 09 Mar 2026, Available online: 12 Mar 2026

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Abstract— *The integration of children with special educational needs into ordinary schools has been a central aspect of ensuring educational rights for all children. Inclusive education is a good practice that provides opportunities for students with special educational needs (SEN) to learn in a regular classroom alongside other students, rather than in a special education classroom. This article reviews literature related to the ongoing research titled "School Teachers' Attitudes Towards Inclusion of Children with Special Education Needs." The study reviewed research papers, journal articles, and educational reports and analyzed them to identify themes related to the topic. Structurally, the article first establishes the teacher's awareness of inclusive education, supported by strong empirical evidence. The influence of personal variables on teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education was established using scholarly articles. Finally, the influence of professional variables on teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education was examined by reviewing empirical evidence. The literature emphasizes that teachers' awareness of inclusive education is not satisfactory. Moreover, the analysis showed that positive and negative attitudes are associated with teachers. Teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education were strongly influenced by their professional variables rather than their personal variables.*

Keywords— *Inclusive education, Children with special educational needs*

I. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The inclusion of children with special educational needs in ordinary schools has been a key element of ensuring educational rights for all children. This has been practiced worldwide since the 1948 United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, which recognizes education as a human right regardless of age, gender, or race. With the emphasis on the importance of education, attention focused on the "education of all" concept many decades ago. In the 1990 International Literacy Year, at the World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand, all countries were called upon to universalize adequate basic education. According to the concept of Education for All and the human rights perspective,

attention was directed toward educating students with special educational needs so that they would also have the opportunity to access equal educational rights.

"Students with special educational needs" is a broader term that encompasses students with disabilities and those with low intellectual capacity. Highly gifted children, as well as children with social and emotional problems, students with learning disabilities, or difficulties of the students who are in their schooling years that make it more difficult for them to learn than most children of their age, are also determined under this term. Inclusive education represents a fundamental paradigm shift in education worldwide today. With the concept of inclusive education, the educational practice

became familiar to children with and without disabilities, who wanted to participate and learn together in the same classes. It aims to remove all the barriers and equip the students with special educational needs with skills that can be utilized in their lives. (Perera & Chandradasa, 2022) By the end of the 20th century, inclusive education policy had drawn increased attention as an increasingly important aspect of ensuring equal educational rights for students with special educational needs. Not only did receiving equal rights, but it was also evident that this concept was a new approach to developing these students. According to Furuta and Alwis (2017), inclusive education is an approach to serving children with special educational needs within mainstream classrooms.

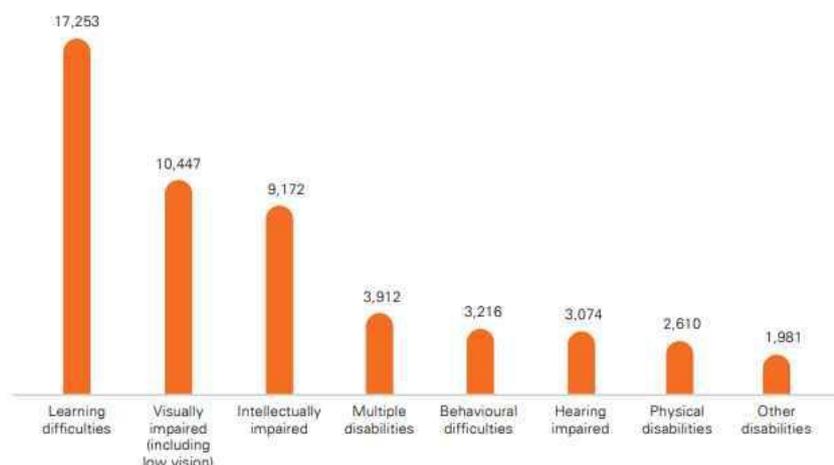
“Inclusive education is when all students, regardless of any challenges they may have, are placed in age-appropriate general education classes that are in their own neighborhood schools. It receives high-quality instruction, interventions, and support that enable them to meet success in the core curriculum.”

(Bui, Quark, Almszan & valenti, 2010: Alquraini & Gut, 2012)

This emphasizes the right to have education for all children by removing barriers and removing discrimination. The child's rights are established in accordance with global trends by taking many steps taken in the Sri Lankan education system to provide education for students with special educational needs

Sri Lanka values education, and the 1948 Education Policy mandates free education at the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels. Government schools provide free education to all students and are committed to ensuring special educational opportunities for students with disabilities. Children with disabilities in Sri Lanka are educated through inclusion in mainstream or specialized schools. However, research conducted on several occasions indicates that there are discrepancies in the provision of inclusive education opportunities, and problems persist at the school level. In stark contrast, of the reported 10.6% of school-aged children in Sri Lanka who have disabilities, 10.2% do not attend school because of their disability, meaning only 0.4% of these children attend school (UNICEF ROSA, 2007). Figure 1 reports the number of students with disabilities enrolled in regular and special education units in Sri Lanka

Figure 1. Number of children with disabilities enrolled in regular and special education units in schools, 2012



Source: Ministry of Education, Education Sector Development Framework and Programme (IESDFP) 2013-2017; Ministry of Education Policy and Planning Branch, Battaramulla, 2012.

The Sri Lankan Ministry of Education has implemented policies to enhance inclusive education in Sri Lanka. From time to time, the Sri Lankan Ministry of Education has recommended measures to improve the quality of inclusive education. The government has provided physical and human resources to sustain the policy in practice. However, empirical research on inclusive education indicates that it does not function as intended

at the school level. Ministry of Social Welfare reports that there are still students with disabilities who continue not to have access to services (as cited in Furuta, 2009). A denying children with disabilities admission to schools, insufficient qualified teachers, and parents lacking awareness regarding educational facilities (Furuta, 2006; Furuta, 2009; UNICEF Rosa, 2007).

According to Saloviita (2020), If a teacher does not want a particular child in her classroom, it is difficult to see how any extra resources or training could save the placement from failure. The mere existence of resources, such as knowledge or assistance, alone cannot determine the outcome. It is also necessary for the teacher to use these resources to attain a determined goal. The success of inclusion or organized placement of children with disabilities in mainstream classrooms largely depends on teachers' attitudes towards students with special educational needs (SEN) and their knowledge of adequately educating them (Dapudong, 2014). Teachers are the primary stakeholders in achieving the expected outcomes of an implemented education policy. They are the people who take action and implement educational reforms at the school level. A key element in the successful implementation of inclusive education is the perspective of the teachers implementing the given policy. It is evident that their attitudes, beliefs, acceptance of the policy, commitment, ideas, and suggestions are essential to achieving the expected outcomes at the school level.

II. METHODOLOGY

This section details how the literature presented in this article was surveyed and evaluated in the study. To ensure the validity of the main themes discussed, the referencing concentrated on research published mainly after 2000. Research papers, e-journals, educational reports, books, and related articles were analysed to identify themes related to the topic. The primary themes of the literature review include the teacher's awareness of inclusive education, the influence of personal variables on teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education, and the impact of professional variables on teachers' attitudes. The research papers, articles, e-journals, and reports were examined through systematic searches of online journal databases (ERIC) and academic catalogues (such as SAGE and Taylor & Francis). Additionally, broader investigations were conducted using general search engines such as Google Scholar.

Teachers' awareness of inclusive education.

Teachers' awareness of inclusive policies is important for their effective implementation at the school level. According to Osisanya et al. (2015), the effectiveness of inclusive education practices depends on teachers' understanding and knowledge of inclusive processes. Much empirical evidence proves that the teacher's

awareness of inclusive education is not sufficient (Vaughn et al., 1996; LeRoy & Simpson, 1996), while some prove that teachers have a good understanding of inclusive education as indicated by their high level of understanding of the important processes involved in its implementation (Chiner & Cardona, 2013; Sharma et al., 2008; Chitiyo & Alasa, 2023). Maria (2013) indicates major differences between what teachers believe about inclusive education, what they know and how they behave in the classroom. This was demonstrated by research among pre-service teachers, who reported relatively limited awareness of inclusive education (Baguisa & Ang-Manaig, 2019; Alnasser, 2020). In their research, AlMahdi and Bukamal (2019) indicate that 17.4% of candidates for teaching positions in the Philippines were unaware of inclusive education policies, and the remainder had a moderate understanding of these policies. Findings from research conducted in Nigeria on English Language teachers' Knowledge, attitudes toward, and practices of Inclusive education revealed that the majority of teachers had limited knowledge of inclusive education (Timothy et al., 2014). Moreover, Wanjiru (2017), in his research conducted in Kenya, found that Kenyan teachers lacked the required knowledge about inclusive education and its policies, which was essential to reaching inclusive goals in their education system. In their research, Gable et al. (2012) indicated that teachers lacked sufficient knowledge to prepare lessons and to educate students with emotional and behavioural disorders in inclusive classrooms. Moreover, Shillingford and Karlin (2014) and Alkathani (2022) indicated that teachers had limited knowledge of how to educate students with emotional and behavioural issues in inclusive classrooms. According to Perera (2024), Inclusive education is when all students are placed in age-appropriate general education classes in their neighbourhood schools regardless of their challenges. The Teacher's awareness of the inclusive policy is important to the better functioning of the policy at the school level. But teacher awareness of Inclusive policy, Assistive technology, teaching methods, and assessment methods is insufficient. Evidence from multiple countries suggests that teachers generally support inclusive education but question their ability to teach in an inclusive classroom (Chiner & Cardona, 2013). For example, surveys in Spain found that although teachers approved of inclusion in theory, few were willing to include students with disabilities in their own classrooms (Cardona, 2001). Sanz-Cervera et al. (2017) identified gaps in knowledge of inclusive education and

misconceptions about inclusive policies. According to Perera (2024), proper awareness and training are needed to improve teaching quality in inclusive classrooms in Sri Lanka. Dar et al. (2023) have shown that substantial knowledge gaps within the education system prevent teachers from supporting inclusive education for children with disabilities.

The Influence of Personal Variables on teacher's attitudes towards inclusive education

Personal variables influence teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education. This was proven by the many empirical research done regarding the topic. Priyadarshani & Thangarajathi (2017), in their study titled "Effects of selected variables on regular teachers' Attitudes towards inclusive education," identified personal variables as type of family, family income, residential status (Rural/urban), age, gender, and marital status. Results indicated that personal variables, except marital status, influence teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education. The Teacher's age influences their attitudes toward professional issues related to inclusive education and logistical concerns. Female teachers hold more positive attitudes toward professional issues related to inclusive education than male teachers. It may be due to female teachers' interest in teaching and their patience in addressing difficult situations. Only family income influences the regular teacher's attitude towards inclusive education. In their study, Avramidis et al. (2000), Survey into mainstream teachers' attitudes towards the inclusion of children with special educational needs, focused on the personal variables of the teachers. Age, Gender, and Marital status were inquired as the personal variables of the teachers who are in the inclusive classrooms. The survey was carried out in one Local Education Authority in the south-west of England, and the sample comprised 81 primary and secondary teachers. The analysis revealed that teachers who have been implementing inclusive programmes and therefore have active experience of inclusion possess more positive attitudes. Moreover, the data showed the importance of professional development in forming positive attitudes towards inclusion. The participants appeared to be generally positive towards the overall concept of inclusion. The one-way MANOVAs for gender and age did not reveal significant differences in the attitude components. Several studies have examined factors influencing in-service teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education. With regard to gender, many studies have reported no significant differences between male and female

teachers (e.g., Avramidis et al., 2000; Chhabra et al., 2010). However, an almost equal number of studies have found that female teachers hold more positive attitudes toward inclusion than male teachers (e.g., Alghazo & Naggat Gaad, 2004; Alquraini, 2012). Only a few studies, limited to secondary school settings, have reported more positive attitudes among male teachers (Bhatnagar & Das, 2014; Ernst & Rogers, 2009). Research findings on the relationship between teachers' age and attitudes toward inclusion have been mixed. Several studies report no significant association between age and attitudes toward inclusive education (Chhabra et al., 2010; Gyimah, Sugden, & Pearson, 2009; Kalyva, Gojkovic, & Tsakiris, 2007). However, more frequently, studies indicate that younger teachers tend to hold slightly more positive attitudes toward inclusion compared to their older counterparts (e.g., Ahmmed, Sharma, & Deppeler, 2014; Bornman & Donohue, 2013; Cornoldi et al., 1999). In terms of age, several studies have found no relationship between teachers' age and attitudes toward inclusion, while others suggest that younger teachers tend to express slightly more positive attitudes than older teachers.

Influence of professional variables on the teacher's attitudes towards inclusive education

Teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education are closely linked to their professional roles and teaching contexts. Across multiple studies, special education teachers consistently emerge as the group with the most positive attitudes toward inclusion, likely due to their specialized training, greater exposure to learners with diverse needs, and stronger sense of professional competence in inclusive practices (Engelbrecht et al., 2013; Forlin et al., 1996; Hernandez et al., 2015; Moberg, 2003; Pearson et al., 2003). School leadership also appears to play a significant role, as principals generally report more favourable attitudes toward inclusion than classroom teachers, possibly reflecting their broader systemic perspective and involvement in policy implementation rather than day-to-day instructional challenges (Boyle et al., 2013; Center & Ward, 1987). Furthermore, differences across school levels are evident, with primary school teachers typically demonstrating more positive attitudes than secondary school teachers. This disparity has been attributed to factors such as smaller class sizes, greater curricular flexibility, and a stronger emphasis on holistic child development in primary education compared to the subject-driven and examination-oriented nature of secondary schooling (Alvarez McHatton & McCray,

2007; Chiner & Cardona, 2013; Larrivee & Cook, 1979; Savage & Wienke, 1989).

Avramindis et al. (2000) did a survey into mainstream teachers' attitudes towards the inclusion of children with special educational needs and identified teachers' educational qualifications, type of school, teaching experience, experience in teaching differently abled children, level of the class and the strength of the class as the professional variables influence the teacher's attitudes towards inclusive education. As shown in the results, teachers with active experience of inclusion held significantly more positive attitudes towards inclusion than those from randomly selected schools. The respondents' level of professional development was significantly related to their attitude towards inclusion. The one-way MANOVAs for teaching experience, phase taught, area of school, size of school, and size of classroom did not reveal significant differences in the attitude components. Teachers with substantial training demonstrated more confidence in meeting the IEP requirements of students with SEN. Teachers who had received external school training were found to be more confident in meeting the IEP requirements of students with SEN than those who received school-based or no training.

Priyadarshani & Thangarajathi (2017) examined professional variables such as education qualifications and type of school. Teaching experience; experience in teaching differently abled; class level; and class strength. The study revealed that the Professional variables, except the nature of the job and the strength of the class, influence the regular school teachers' attitude towards inclusive education. Furthermore, it was evident that the teacher's attitude towards inclusive education as a whole is influenced by the type of school, teaching experience in the present school and level of class, while it is not influenced by other professional variables, viz. educational qualification, strength of the class, experience in teaching differently abled, nature of job, and teaching experience. Teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education appear to vary according to professional role. Research consistently shows that special education teachers tend to hold the most positive attitudes toward inclusion (Engelbrecht et al., 2013; Forlin et al., 1996; Hernandez et al., 2015; Moberg, 2003; Pearson et al., 2003). In addition, school principals generally demonstrate more favourable attitudes toward inclusion than classroom teachers (Boyle et al., 2013; Center & Ward, 1987). Differences are also evident across school levels, with primary school teachers typically expressing more positive

attitudes toward inclusive education than secondary school teachers (Alvarez McHatton & McCray, 2007; Chiner & Cardona, 2013; Larrivee & Cook, 1979; Savage & Wienke, 1989). Teachers' attitudes toward professional issues related to inclusive education are influenced by educational qualifications, type of school, teaching experience, teaching experience in the current school, experience teaching students with disabilities, and class level. whereas it is not influenced by the nature of the job and the strength of the class.

Research conducted in South Africa on barriers to inclusion highlighted teachers' concerns about the challenges posed by increasing student diversity in the classroom. Teachers reported a lack of adequate knowledge, facilities, skills, and training. These concerns shaped teachers' perceptions of inclusion. After receiving training, teachers felt more positively about including students with disabilities. Pre-test and post-test scores showed that teachers who participated in the study increased their teaching skills and knowledge of inclusive education (Oswald & Swart, 2011). Similarly, a study of teachers in Uganda found that those who had some form of training in inclusive education held more optimistic and willing attitudes towards inclusion than those without any form of inclusion training (Ojok & Wormnæs, 2013). According to Perera & Chandradasa (2022), When schools identify the students with special educational needs, appropriate considerations need to be taken to provide those students with the best learning environment possible.

III. CONCLUSIONS

Inclusive education is when all students, regardless of their challenges, are placed in age-appropriate general education classes in their neighborhood schools. Teachers' awareness of inclusive policies is important for their effective implementation at the school level. Teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education yielded mixed results. In several studies, personal variables such as age, Gender, and Marital status have shown both positive and negative effects on teachers' attitudes. It was significant that professional variables like education qualifications and type of school were used. Teaching experience, Experience in teaching differently abled, level of class. The strength of class has influenced the attitudes of the teachers towards inclusive education.

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