

# Teachers' Attitudes Towards Inclusive Education: A Literature Review

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**Abstract** This study conducted to investigate the teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education, and what variables are influenced to their attitudes. A review of 27 literatures that involves 5471 teachers resulted that most of the teacher hold positive attitudes towards inclusive education. Some studies also report negative and neutral attitudes. The term of attitudes was defined differently among the studies. The variables that found influence to the attitudes include are found on teacher's educational degree and background, teacher training, and the type of the disability. The implication of the attitudes towards inclusion were discussed.

**Keywords:** Teachers' attitudes, inclusive education, student with disabilities

## 1. Research Background

The practice of educating learners with disabilities in general classroom has been a reality in many countries for more than 20 years after the Salamanca Statement in 1994. As a philosophical foundation to provide equal access for all learners, inclusive education transforms restricted school environments into more friendly and accessible environments for students' diversity. However, after several years implemented, it has been suggested that the inclusion faces several challenges, for example; misleading policy (1), lack of support (2), insufficient training (3), and teachers' attitudes (4).

There is a common belief that the effectiveness of inclusion is dependent on teachers' role. Both general and special educators are the main agents to create less restricted environments in their classrooms. Their positive attitudes and expectations are important for successful inclusion (5), and particularly for students' outcomes (6). Teachers with positive attitudes towards inclusion tend to be more ready to adjust their approaches in order to benefit all learners with a range of learning needs (7).

Attitude as one of important concept in the field of social psychology can be defined simply as "like" and "dislike" (Bem, 1970, in 8). Define attitude more broadly as "a person's predisposition to think (cognitive component), feel (affective component), and behave (behavioural component) in certain ways towards certain defined targets." (9). With regard inclusive education, attitudes refer to the way teachers think of it, how the teachers feel about it, and how they behave towards it.

Many researches have examined teachers' attitude towards inclusion; they explored inclination attitudes that support the successful of inclusion. This paper investigates teachers' attitudes and factors, which influence their attitudes towards inclusive education.

## 2. Method

Qualitative method by systematic literature review (SLR) was set up in order to present a complete and recent overview of empirical studies published in the last 15 years. The procedure used to search for references, to select studies and to analyse the attitudes of the teachers towards inclusive education.

### 2.1. Procedure and Selection of Studies

Database from ERIC (2006-2014), Taylor and Francis (2006-2014), and Proquest (2006-2014), Elsevier (2007-2014), SAGE

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(2010-2014), Springer (2010-2014) were distributed the references for this research. Some journals such as Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs (JORSEN), International Journal of Special Education, International Journal of Inclusive Education, Journal of Education and Training, Exceptionality Education International, Journal of Disability Policy Studies, Early Child Development and Care, Remedial and Special Education, British Journal of Learning Support, European Journal of Special Needs Education, and Asia Pacific Journal of Education were also hand searched for relevant articles.

The data collection using the term “teacher attitudes” resulted in 52 references. The following criteria deployed to select the relevant references:

- Published between 2006 and 2014.
- Contained empirical data and method.
- Peer-reviewed internationally.
- Measuring and concern on teachers’ attitudes towards inclusive education.
- Using standardized instruments.

### 3. Result and Discussion

#### 3.1. Overview Studies of Teachers’ Attitudes towards Inclusion

Several studies in numerous countries revealed various attitudes of general educators towards inclusion. Some of these studies reported that general educators have positive attitudes towards inclusion, such as Subban and Sharma (7) in Australia, Idol (10) in United States, Gal, Schreur (11) in Israel, Khochen and Radford (12) in Lebanon, and Todorovic, Stojiljkovic (13) in Serbia. Furthermore, Chiner and Cardona (14) reported a positive attitudes although teacher skills, time, material resources, and personal supports for inclusion were deemed insufficient. Also, Bhatnagar and Das (15) recommended maintaining teachers’ attitudes and developing their knowledge of inclusion to create a successful inclusion.

On the other hand, multiple studies reported teachers’ negative attitudes towards inclusion, such as Rakap and Kaczmarek (16) in Turkey, Hwang and Evans (2) in Korea, and Hofman and Kilimo (17) in Tanzania. In addition, Gaad and Khan (18) identified that their teachers

participants showed lack of skills and expressed heavy teaching loads to meet the needs of students with disabilities. Under such circumstances, the teachers generally held frustration and negative attitudes towards the inclusion of students with disabilities in regular classroom settings.

By contrast, a study of Hsieh and Hsieh (19) indicated teachers’ neutral point towards inclusion. Teachers’ attitude (n=130) mean was 2.58 (SD = 0.50), slightly above the mid-point of 2.5 on a four-point scale. This suggests that the teachers had a moderately positive attitude toward inclusive education.

Comparative research among countries was conducted by Helldin, Bäckman (20). They found that teachers in Sweden are more pro-inclusion than those in South Africa. Another study by Savolainen, Engelbrecht (21) reported that Finnish teachers’ attitudes towards inclusion are close to the neutral mid-point. As well as the South African teachers of the Sentiments Attitudes and Concerns about Inclusive Education (SACIE) scale.

Other studies compared teachers’ attitudes based on their educational qualifications. Emam and Mohamed (22) found no differences between preschool and primary school teachers’ attitudes. However, the primary school teachers showed a higher sense of self-efficacy than the preschool teachers regarding the management and teaching of learners with special needs. Moreover, Galović, Brojčin (23) reported that high school and preschool teachers have more positive attitudes towards inclusive education than those from primary and secondary schools. Interestingly, a study by Combs, Elliott (24) reported two different perspectives. Employing in-depth interviews with four general physical educators. They found that one group had a positive attitude; believing that every child had the right to quality physical education. Whereas, the other group, had negative attitudes toward inclusion; they argued that their teaching was ineffective because it took so much time to deal with children with special needs, such as assessing and doing paperwork. Finally, there are only two researches revealing attitude components. For instance, Kurniawati, Minnaert (25) reported that although teachers were less in favour (affective component), they indicated strong willingness (behavioural component) to include learners with disabilities in their classrooms. Another study conducted by Vermeulen, Denessen (26) showed that even

though teachers had less positive beliefs (cognitive component), they showed responsive behaviour (behaviour component). For example, John (a science teacher) believed that inclusion would work as long as the differentiation of students in a class is not too large. Furthermore, he believed that diagnosing children with disabilities is important as a base of educational services addressing their needs. Overall, there are various attitudes towards inclusive education identified by the studies. The number of studies which revealed positive attitudes are slightly bigger than those which negative attitudes; fewer reported mixed and neutral attitudes. Unfortunately, most of these studies do not clearly define the concept of attitudes; they also do not investigate the attitudes based on its components. Consequently, it is difficult to analyse the results of the study and make conclusions based on the findings, as there were only two studies examined teachers' attitude based on its components.

### **3.2. Factors that Influence the attitude towards inclusive education**

#### ***Educational degrees and field backgrounds***

Regarding educational degrees, Ahmmed, Sharma (27) found that the mean score for Group 2 (Bachelor degree qualification) was significantly different from Group 3 (Master or above degree qualification). Group 1 (below bachelor degree qualification) did not differ significantly from either Group 2 or group 3. Furthermore, teachers with bachelor degrees and those with medium level education are different in terms of their prejudices towards the integration of children with special educational needs in mainstream schools (4). Conversely, a study by Galović, Brojčin (23) indicated no significant differences between educators with college degrees (n=59) and those with at least a bachelor's degrees (n = 260). As well as Savolainen, Engelbrecht (21) which found that teachers' educational backgrounds did not have any effect on attitudes.

#### ***Self-efficacy***

Teachers with low self-efficacy face more problems with the implementation of IE (17); there are significant relationship between

teachers' self-efficacy and attitudes towards the inclusion (22).

However, Savolainen, Engelbrecht (21) reported that mean score of self-efficacy of Finnish and South African teachers was high with mean = 4.53 on the TEIP scale ranging from 1 to 6 and 4.63. It is contrast to their neutral attitudes mean score 2.51 of a scale ranging from 1 to 4 and 2.39, meaning that self-efficacy is not significantly related to teachers' attitudes towards inclusion.

#### ***Teaching experience***

The relationship between teaching experience and teachers' beliefs towards inclusion was not significant (28). Teachers with less experience have similar beliefs toward inclusion as teachers with more experience (23).

On the contrary, Savolainen, Engelbrecht (21), Todorovic, Stojiljkovic (13) and (29) argue that teachers with less teaching experience were more positive towards inclusion while Emam and Mohamed (22) found that teachers with more experience had more positive attitudes than those with less experience.

#### ***Trainings***

Galović, Brojčin (23) found no significant differences among groups of teachers with and without trainings. Whereas, Subban and Sharma (7) reported that teachers who had a prior training in teaching students with disabilities appeared to hold more positive attitudes than teachers who had not. Additionally, Kurniawati, Minnaert (25) reported that teachers with special education trainings scored higher than their counterparts without such trainings on the Cognitive-Affective component and Behavioural components. Also, teachers who attended more INSET (in-service training) courses held more positive feelings toward children with social and emotional disorder than teachers who attended less (28).

#### ***Students' differentiation***

Related to the type of disabilities, some researchers suggest that teachers' attitudes are less favourable toward the inclusion of students with behavioural and emotional disorders (e.g. 7; Chhabra et al., 2010; Khochen & Radford, 2011; Vermeulen et al., 2012).

Some studies revealed that the level of disabilities influences teachers' attitudes such

as Sukbunpant, Arthur-Kelly (30) who found less positive attitudes of teachers. The teachers believed that children with severe disabilities should not be included in regular classrooms. Similarly, Yeo, Chong (31) cited on their teacher participants “If the child is high-functioning, it tends to make inclusion a little easier. If the child is low-functioning or unidentified, it makes things a little more challenging.”

### 3.3. Discussion

Twenty-seven studies focusing on teachers’ attitudes towards inclusion were closely examined in this review. Involving 5225 teachers in survey and 246 teachers in interview sessions, they employed various sampling and were conducted in various setting.

The majority of teachers have constructive attitudes toward educating learners with special needs in regular schools. This finding is contradiction with de Boer, Pijl (5) and Rajovic and Jovanovic (3) reviews which indicated that teachers had negative attitudes towards inclusive education. However, the results presented in this paper are difficult to be generalize, because not all researchers clearly addressed three components of attitude.

Based on the review, an important point can be noted regarding the implementation of inclusive education. Even though inclusion has been implemented over past two decades, somewhat, teachers’ attitudes has not shifted to a desired point. Teachers, playing key roles in education, should have deep understanding of educational changes and gain particular skills to increase their competency as teacher for all learners. The changing of teachers’ attitudes can be achieved by developing their knowledge of inclusion to create a better attitude, which reflect the way of they think, feel and behave, particularly in relation to inclusion.

This review has an implication for the way teachers’ attitudes are considered as important variable affecting effective inclusion. Based on the review, teachers’ attitude should be enhanced by providing adequate resources and supports to the teachers. Adequate resources include providing suitable accommodation, individual plans, and inclusive teaching methods (12), and adequate supports include sharing information and strategies on learners with disabilities with other professionals such as special education teachers, teacher assistants (30) and school psychologists (32).

Additionally, professional development programs or trainings are necessary for developing teachers’ understandings of learners with disabilities and how to cater them (6). The provision of trainings at both pre- and in-service levels should be the first concern educational stakeholders. When teachers are able to understand and master the skills of teaching learners with special needs they would be more committed to changes as their intention and competency improve.

Furthermore, there is a need of a policy consider of types and severity of disability, particularly in settings where teachers are less favourable to include learners with emotional and behavioural disorders and severe intellectual disabilities. More trainings, resources and supports are needed when more learners with emotional and behavioural disorders and severe intellectual disabilities are involved in general classrooms.

In general, it is obvious that teachers have a positive attitude toward inclusive education. However, they need sufficient external support to help provide appropriate approaches for learners with special needs. Hence, the successful of inclusion is dependent upon the supports given to these teachers.

### 4. Conclusion

The review reveals the teachers’ attitude towards inclusive education are predominantly positive in most studied countries such as Australia, United States, Lebanon, India, Spain, Israel and Serbia.

The term of “attitude” employed in this paper is based on the concept of Arnold and Randall (9), which consists of beliefs (cognitive component), feelings (affective component) and behaviours (behavioural component). Unfortunately, most of the research reviewed did not define the concept of “attitudes”. This makes the result difficult to be generalized. Furthermore, the investigations become inaccurate as in some studies the term of “attitudes” was replaced by “perception” (14, 33), “views” (30), and “experience” (31).

In most studies, teachers’ attitudes are examined using Likert-type inventories in which respondents must indicate the degree of agreement and disagreement. Therefore, it is difficult to measure real attitudes, because the range among responses is too narrow. The respondents were forced to make choices from the given options that may not match their exact

responses (34). Alternative research methods are needed to support the main data, such as interviews and observations.

With regard to factors that may influence teachers' attitudes, the review highlights the importance of teachers' educational degree and field. The studies suggest that teaching experience, whether longer or lesser, influences teachers' attitudes. Teacher trainings are related to teachers' attitudes; this has been fully supported by most researchers. Moreover, learners with emotional and behaviour disorders and severe intellectual disabilities have more negative influences to teachers' attitudes, rather than learners with other disabilities. The studies reported that self-efficacy might related to this, but it still needs further investigation. Therefore, this review suggests that education stakeholders in every country must consider developing teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education by issuing the right policies, providing necessary resources, and facilitating adequate pre-service and in-service training for the teachers in order to understand and apply inclusive educational practices in their classrooms. It is impossible to make inclusion work without knowing what the meaning of this concept is and what the principles of this type of education are (35).

In relation to the belief that attitudes are important for inclusion, further questions regarding the impact of teachers' attitudes should be explored, for example, the impact on learners' outcomes and schools' cultures. Moreover, other school factors that influences to teachers' attitudes such as organizations, policies, and community cultures need to be further explored. Comprehensive methods are needed in the investigation of teachers' attitude. These include surveys, observations and interviews. Qualitative approaches such as self-study, case study and narrative can be employed as alternative methods for improving our understanding of the relationship of teachers' knowledge, experiences and attitudes.

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**Table 1.** Summarize overview of the selected studies (n = 27).

No.	Author	Year	Country	Method(S)	Participants	Relating Factors	Attitudes Impact
1.	Ahmed, Sharma, & Deppeler	2012	Bangladesh	Quantitative, Survey	738 teachers	√	x
2.	Ahmed, Sharma, & Deppeler	2014	India	Qualitative, Interviews	20 General school teachers	x	x
3.	Ahmed, Sharma, & Deppeler	2014	India	Quantitative, Survey	470 teachers	√	X
4.	Chhabra, Srivastava, & Srivastava	2010	Botswana	Quantitative, Survey	103 General school teachers	√	X
5.	Chiner & Cardona,	2012	Spain	Quantitative, survey	336 general education teachers (kindergarten, elementary, and secondary)	√	√
6.	Combs et al.,	2010	United states of America	Qualitative, Interviews	4 general physical education (GPE) teachers	√	√
7.	Dukmak	2013	United Arab Emirates	Quantitative, survey	455 teachers	√	√
8.	Emam & Mohamed	2011	Egypt	Quantitative, standardized questionnaires	71 preschool teachers and 95 primary school teachers	√	√
9.	Gaad & Khan	2007	United Arab Emirates	Qualitative, questionnaire and interviews	Teachers from two private mainstream schools	√	√
10.	Gal et al.,	2010	Israel	Quantitative, standardized questionnaires	53 preschools teachers	√	X
11.	Galović et al.,	2014	Serbia	Quantitative, scales	322 general teachers	x	x
12.	Helldin et al.,	2011	Sweden and South Africa	Mixed Method, standardized questionnaires	275 teachers	x	√
13.	Hofman & Kilimo	2014	Tanzania	Quantitative, standardized questionnaires	100 teachers	√	√
14.	Hsieh & Hsieh	2011	United States	Quantitative, survey	130 teachers	√	√
15.	Hwang & Evans	2011	Republic of Korea	Mixed Method, questionnaire and interviews	33 teachers	x	√
16.	Khochén & Radford	2011	Lebanon	Mixed Method	40 teachers	√	√

No.	Author	Year	Country	Method(S)	Participants	Relating Factors	Attitudes Impact
17.	Kurniawati et al.,	2012	Indonesia	Quantitative, scales	208 teachers from special schools, inclusive schools, and regular schools.	√	x
18.	MacFarlane & Woolfson	2013	Scotland	Quantitative, standardized questionnaires	92 teachers	√	√
19.	Maria	2013	Romania	Quantitative, self-administered questionnaire	200 teachers	√	x
20.	Rakap & Kaczmarek	2010	Turkey	Quantitative, survey	194 teachers	x	x
21.	Savolainen et al.,	2011	South Africa and Finland	Quantitative, survey	319 South African and 822 Finnish teachers	√	x
22.	Subban & Sharma	2006	Australia	Quantitative, standardized questionnaires	122 teachers	√	x
23.	Sukbunpant, Arthur-Kelly, & Dempsey	2012	Thailand	Qualitative, interviews	20 teachers	√	x
24.	Todorovic et al.,	2011	Serbia	Quantitative, standardized questionnaires	100 teachers	√	X
25.	Unianu	2012	Romania	Quantitative, survey	112 teachers	√	X
26.	Vermeulen et al.,	2012	Netherland	Qualitative, interviews	12 teachers	√	√
27.	Yeo, Chong, Neihart, & Huan	2014	Singapore	Quantitative, standardized questionnaires	202 teachers	√	√