



Mainstream and Special School Teachers' Attitudes Towards Inclusive Education in India: A Comparative Study Using the STATIC Scale

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Abstract: Teacher attitudes are widely recognised as an important school-level factor influencing the implementation of inclusive education, yet the comparative attitudinal positions of mainstream and special school teachers remain under-examined in the Indian context. This study compared the attitudes of mainstream and special school teachers towards the inclusive education model using a quantitative, cross-sectional, comparative survey design. A stratified, non-probability sample of 400 practising teachers (200 mainstream, 200 special) completed the Scale of Teachers' Attitudes Toward Inclusive Classrooms (STATIC), a 20-item instrument comprising four sub-scales: advantages and disadvantages of inclusion, feelings toward inclusion, philosophical beliefs, and administrative concerns. The instrument demonstrated good-to-excellent reliability (overall $\alpha = 0.79$; sub-scale $\alpha = 0.85-0.92$). Special school teachers held significantly more favourable overall attitudes than mainstream teachers ($M = 4.99$ vs 4.64), $t(398) = 7.32$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.73$. The difference was largest on the feelings sub-scale ($d = 0.84$), moderate for perceived advantages ($d = 0.46$), small for administrative concerns ($d = 0.24$), and negligible for philosophical beliefs ($d = -0.07$, $p = .46$), indicating a shared philosophical commitment to inclusion across both groups. Teaching experience was unrelated to attitude, $F(3, 396) = 1.27$, $p = .285$. Multiple regression identified group membership as the only significant predictor ($B = 0.34$, $p < .001$; $R^2 = 0.12$), with training and group strongly confounded, $\chi^2(1, N = 400) = 70.37$, $p < .001$, Cramér's $V = 0.42$. The findings suggest that the attitudinal gap between the two teacher cadres is affective and practical rather than philosophical, and the findings support greater attention to structured experiential engagement with learners with disabilities and efficacy-building opportunities alongside formal instruction.

Keywords: inclusive education; teacher attitudes; STATIC; special education; mainstream schools; India; RPWD Act 2016; National Education Policy 2020

1. INTRODUCTION

The movement towards inclusive education represents one of the most significant reorientations in the history of educational provision. Its normative foundations were laid internationally by the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994), which affirmed that ordinary schools with an inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, and consolidated by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 2006), whose Article 24 obliges States Parties to ensure an inclusive education system at all levels. In India, these commitments have been given statutory and policy force by the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, which recognises twenty-one disabilities and mandates inclusive education, and by the National Education Policy 2020, which envisions the full participation of children with disabilities in regular schooling (Government of India, 2016; Ministry of Education, 2020).

Legislation, however, does not by itself transform classrooms. A substantial international literature converges on



the conclusion that the attitudes of teachers constitute an important proximal condition for the success of inclusion: teachers who hold favourable attitudes differentiate instruction more willingly, persist longer with learners who struggle, and model acceptance for typically developing peers, whereas unfavourable attitudes predict resistance, referral, and the quiet exclusion of children who are nominally enrolled (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; de Boer et al., 2011). Attitude, in the classical tripartite conception, comprises cognitive, affective, and behavioural components (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993), and the theory of planned behaviour predicts that attitudes, together with perceived behavioural control, shape teachers' instructional intentions (Ajzen, 1991). It follows that the structure of teacher attitudes, and not merely their overall valence, is of both theoretical and practical interest.

Within this literature, a comparison of particular salience for policy remains under-examined in India: that between teachers working in mainstream schools, who are expected to receive and teach learners with disabilities, and teachers working in special schools, whose professional formation and daily practice centre on such learners. If the two cadres differ systematically in their attitudes, the location and nature of the difference carry direct implications for teacher education, for the deployment of special educators as resource persons in mainstream settings, and for the design of the cross-sector collaboration that the RPWD Act and NEP 2020 presuppose. The present study addresses this gap by comparing the attitudes of 400 mainstream and special school teachers using a validated multidimensional instrument, and by examining the contribution of experience, training, qualification, and locality to those attitudes.

2. Objectives and Hypotheses

The study pursued three objectives: (a) to compare the overall attitudes of mainstream and special school teachers towards the inclusive education model; (b) to compare the two groups on each of four attitudinal dimensions, namely perceived advantages and disadvantages of inclusion, feelings toward inclusion, philosophical beliefs, and administrative concerns; and (c) to examine the association of teaching experience, prior training in inclusive education, qualification, and locality with attitudes. Seven null hypotheses were tested: no difference between groups in overall attitude (H0-1); no difference on each of the four sub-scales (H0-2 to H0-5); no association between teaching experience and attitude (H0-6); and no interaction between group and training (H0-7). All hypotheses were tested at the .05 level of significance.

3. Review of Related Literature

Two landmark reviews frame the field. Avramidis and Norwich (2002) synthesised the international evidence on teachers' attitudes towards integration and inclusion and concluded that while teachers broadly endorse the philosophy of inclusion, their support is conditional upon the nature and severity of the disability and upon the availability of resources and support, a pattern the authors described as positive but not unequivocal. De Boer et al. (2011), reviewing twenty-six studies of primary teachers, found that the majority held neutral or negative attitudes towards the inclusion of learners with special needs, with training, experience of inclusive teaching, and self-efficacy emerging as the most consistent correlates of more favourable positions. Together, the reviews establish that attitudes are multidimensional, conditional, and malleable, and that the variables most amenable to policy, training and structured contact, are also those most consistently associated with attitudinal favourability.

The evidence on training and contact merits particular attention. Sharma et al. (2008) demonstrated that focused coursework on inclusive education improved pre-service teachers' attitudes and reduced their concerns across four countries, while Forlin and Chambers (2011) showed that increases in knowledge, unless accompanied by authentic engagement with persons with disabilities, may raise concerns even as they raise awareness, an instructive caution against purely doctrinal preparation. The theoretical warrant for structured contact derives ultimately from Allport's (1954) contact hypothesis: under conditions of equal status, common goals, and institutional support, contact with members of an out-group reduces prejudice, and the daily professional contact of special educators with learners with disabilities resembles such sustained, purposive engagement, although whether that contact produces attitudinal change is a causal question that cross-sectional designs, including the present one, cannot resolve.

Indian studies, though fewer, corroborate the international pattern while revealing distinctive contextual features. Parasuram (2006), studying teachers in Mumbai, found that attitudes towards disability and inclusion varied with personal familiarity with disability and with socio-demographic variables. Bhatnagar and Das (2014) reported that secondary teachers in Delhi were, on the whole, positive towards inclusion but identified inadequate training and infrastructural support as principal concerns. Singal (2006) observed that inclusive education in India has been adopted as an international concept subject to national interpretation, with implementation frequently outrunning the preparation



of the teaching force. What the Indian literature has largely lacked is a direct comparison of the mainstream and special school cadres using a common validated instrument, the contribution the present study seeks to make.

4. Method

Design

The study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional, comparative survey design. The approach is quantitative because the constructs of interest are operationalised as numerical scores amenable to statistical analysis; cross-sectional because data were gathered at a single point in time; and comparative because its central purpose is to contrast two defined groups of teachers. A quantitative design was preferred because the study's aims are confirmatory rather than exploratory: the constructs are well established, a validated instrument exists, and the research questions concern the existence, direction, and magnitude of group differences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Participants

The sample comprised a stratified, non-probability sample of 400 practising school teachers, 200 drawn from mainstream schools and 200 from special schools. Schools were first approached for access, and teachers were then randomly selected within participating schools; because participation depended upon the schools that agreed to take part, the sample should not be read as a probability sample of the wider teacher population, and school-level clustering could not be modelled. The equal allocation of the two groups was deliberate, maximising statistical power for between-groups comparison. The realised sample was diverse in gender, teaching experience (from fewer than five to more than twenty years), qualification (B.Ed, M.Ed, and specialist special-education degrees), and locality. The two groups were closely comparable in gender and experience but differed, as expected, in specialist qualification and, most markedly, in prior training in inclusive education, a differential treated analytically rather than set aside (Section 4.7).

Instrument

Attitudes were measured with the Scale of Teachers' Attitudes Toward Inclusive Classrooms (STATIC; Cochran, 1997), a 20-item instrument answered on a six-point Likert continuum, yielding an overall score and four factor scores: Factor 1, perceived advantages and disadvantages of inclusive education; Factor 2, feelings toward inclusion; Factor 3, philosophical beliefs regarding inclusion; and Factor 4, administrative and logistical concerns. The STATIC was selected for its established psychometric properties, its multidimensional structure aligned with the tripartite theory of attitude, and its extensive use in prior research, which permits comparison of results across studies. Reliability with the present sample was good to excellent.

Procedure and Ethics

Data were collected in person under standardised instructions. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained, responses were anonymous, and no identifying information was recorded. Completed responses were screened for missing and out-of-range values prior to analysis; the anonymous, structured mode of administration yielded a high level of completeness. Distributions of the composite scores were approximately normal, satisfying the assumptions of the parametric tests employed.

Analytical Strategy

Analysis proceeded in seven steps: (a) reliability analysis by Cronbach's alpha; (b) descriptive statistics by group; (c) independent-samples t-tests with Cohen's d for the overall scale and each sub-scale, supplemented by 95% confidence intervals for the mean differences; (d) one-way analysis of variance of attitude across experience bands, and across qualification and locality categories; (e) a 2×2 factorial analysis of variance of group by training with Type III sums of squares; (f) Pearson correlations among the sub-scales, the overall score, and experience; and (g) multiple regression predicting overall attitude from experience, group, and training, with multicollinearity diagnostics (all VIF ≤ 1.22). The association between group and training was tested by chi-square. All tests were two-tailed at $\alpha = .05$. Non-significant findings are interpreted through effect sizes and confidence intervals rather than as evidence of no effect.



5. Results

Reliability

Internal consistency was good to excellent for the overall scale and all four sub-scales (Table 1), confirming that the STATIC functioned reliably with the present sample and that its sub-scales possess sufficient internal consistency to support the analyses that follow.

Table 1. Internal Consistency (Cronbach's α) of the STATIC and its Sub-scales

Scale / Sub-scale	α
Overall scale (20 items)	0.79
Factor 1: Advantages & Disadvantages	0.92
Factor 2: Feelings toward Inclusion	0.90
Factor 3: Philosophical Beliefs	0.85
Factor 4: Administrative Concerns	0.92

Descriptive Statistics

Special school teachers recorded a higher mean than mainstream teachers on the overall scale and on three of the four sub-scales, the exception being philosophical beliefs, on which the two groups were nearly coincident (Table 2). Both groups scored well above the scale midpoint, indicating that, in absolute terms, both held favourable attitudes towards inclusion. Item-level examination confirmed that the sub-scale differences were not artefacts of one or two anomalous items but reflected consistent patterns across the constituent items of each factor.

Table 2. Means and Standard Deviations by Group

Measure	Mainstream M	SD	Special M	SD
Overall attitude	4.64	0.49	4.99	0.45
F1: Advantages & Disadvantages	4.00	1.18	4.51	1.03
F2: Feelings toward Inclusion	4.61	1.01	5.30	0.59
F3: Philosophical Beliefs	5.25	0.65	5.20	0.76
F4: Administrative Concerns	4.71	1.03	4.95	0.99

Group Comparisons

The principal null hypothesis was rejected: special school teachers held significantly more favourable overall attitudes than mainstream teachers, $t(398) = 7.32$, $p < .001$, with a medium-to-large effect ($d = 0.73$). Across the sub-scales the differences formed a sharply differentiated profile (Table 3). The largest difference lay on the feelings sub-scale ($d = 0.84$, a large effect); perceived advantages showed a small-to-medium difference ($d = 0.46$); administrative concerns a small but significant difference ($d = 0.24$); and philosophical beliefs no difference at all ($d = -0.07$, $p = .46$), so that H0-2, H0-3, and H0-5 were rejected while H0-4 was retained. Confidence intervals for the mean differences (Table 4) lay wholly above zero for the overall scale and the advantages and feelings sub-scales, narrowly above zero for administrative concerns, and spanned zero for philosophical beliefs.

Table 3. Independent-samples t-tests and Effect Sizes

Measure	t	df	p	Cohen's d	Decision
Overall	7.32	398	< .001	0.73	Reject H0-1



F1: Advantages & Disadv.	4.55	398	< .001	0.46	Reject H0-2
F2: Feelings	8.39	398	< .001	0.84	Reject H0-3
F3: Philosophical Beliefs	-0.74	398	.460	-0.07	Retain H0-4
F4: Administrative Concerns	2.37	398	.018	0.24	Reject H0-5

Table 4. Mean Differences (Special – Mainstream) with 95% Confidence Intervals

Measure	Mean difference	95% CI lower	95% CI upper
Overall	0.346	0.253	0.439
F1: Advantages & Disadvantages	0.503	0.286	0.720
F2: Feelings	0.694	0.531	0.857
F3: Philosophical Beliefs	-0.052	-0.190	0.086
F4: Administrative Concerns	0.239	0.041	0.437

Experience, Qualification, and Locality

One-way analysis of variance across four experience bands (0–5, 6–10, 11–20, 21+ years) revealed no significant differences, $F(3, 396) = 1.27$, $p = .285$, $\eta^2 = 0.01$; H0-6 was retained, and the near-flat profile of means indicates that years of service, considered in isolation, bear little relationship to attitude, a conclusion corroborated by the negligible correlation between experience and attitude. Qualification showed a small but significant association with attitude, $F(4, 395) = 2.89$, $p = .022$, $\eta^2 = 0.028$, while locality showed none, $F(2, 397) = 1.19$, $p = .304$, $\eta^2 = 0.006$.

Group, Training, and their Confounding

A 2×2 factorial analysis of variance with group and training as factors revealed a significant main effect of group, $F(1, 396) = 38.16$, $p < .001$, no main effect of training, $F(1, 396) = 0.06$, $p = .80$, and no interaction, $F(1, 396) = 0.31$, $p = .58$; H0-7 was retained. The cell means (Table 5) are illuminating: within each group, trained and untrained teachers held nearly identical attitudes, so that any apparent bivariate effect of training is carried substantially by the concentration of trained teachers in the special school group. Chi-square analysis confirmed the strength of that concentration: the association between group and training was strong and highly significant, $\chi^2(1, N = 400) = 70.37$, $p < .001$, Cramér's $V = 0.42$.

Table 5. Cell Means for the Group $\times$ Training Design (Overall Attitude)

Group	Training	n	M	SD
Mainstream	No	115	4.62	0.53
Mainstream	Yes	85	4.67	0.44
Special	No	33	5.00	0.40
Special	Yes	167	4.98	0.46

Multivariate Prediction of Attitude

A multiple regression model with overall attitude as the dependent variable and experience, group membership, and prior training as predictors was statistically significant, $F(3, 396) = 18.38$, $p < .001$, accounting for approximately twelve per cent of the variance ($R^2 = 0.12$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.12$). Multicollinearity diagnostics were satisfactory (all VIF ≤ 1.22). Group membership was by far the strongest predictor and the only one to reach significance once the others were held constant: being a special school teacher was associated with a higher overall attitude score, $B = 0.34$, 95% CI [0.23, 0.44], $p < .001$. Prior training showed a small, non-significant association once group was controlled, $B = 0.02$, 95% CI [-0.08,



0.13], $p = .68$, and experience a negligible one, $B = -0.01$, 95% CI $[-0.02, 0.00]$, $p = .23$. Pearson correlations among the sub-scales were moderate and positive, consistent with their measuring related facets of a common underlying attitude, while correlations between attitude and experience were negligible.

6. Discussion

A Differentiated Attitudinal Profile

The study's most distinctive contribution lies not in the finding that special school teachers hold more favourable attitudes than their mainstream colleagues, though the size of that difference ($d = 0.73$) is itself noteworthy, but in the structure of the difference. The two cadres are statistically indistinguishable in their philosophical commitment to inclusion: on the beliefs sub-scale, both groups scored above 5.2 on a six-point scale, and the confidence interval for their difference spans zero. They diverge, instead, in affect ($d = 0.84$), in the perceived practical advantages of inclusion ($d = 0.46$), and, modestly, in administrative confidence ($d = 0.24$). The attitudinal gap between the sectors is therefore affective and practical rather than doctrinal: mainstream teachers do not need to be persuaded that inclusion is right; they need to feel confident and equipped to enact it.

This pattern maps directly onto the tripartite theory of attitude (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993): cognitive endorsement can be transmitted through policy discourse and coursework, and evidently has been, while affective comfort and practical confidence may be shaped by sustained engagement with learners with disabilities. The pattern is likewise consistent with the possibility, anticipated by the contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954), that sustained professional contact with learners with disabilities contributes to more favourable affect, although the cross-sectional design cannot establish this mechanism, and self-selection into special education remains an equally admissible reading of the same data. The finding also refines the conditional-support conclusion of Avramidis and Norwich (2002): the condition on mainstream teachers' support appears to be less philosophical reservation than felt preparedness.

The Confounding of Training and Group

The analysis of training repays careful reading. Bivariately, trained teachers appear more favourable; multivariately, training contributes nothing once group membership is controlled, and within each group trained and untrained teachers are nearly indistinguishable. The chi-square analysis explains why: training is so strongly concentrated in the special school cadre (Cramér's $V = 0.42$) that its effect cannot be separated from the wider ensemble of experiences that group membership represents, daily contact, institutional culture, specialist collegiality, and self-selection into the field. Two implications follow. Methodologically, cross-sectional bivariate associations between training and attitude, common in the literature, are vulnerable to precisely this confound and should be interpreted with caution. Substantively, the finding is that, in this cross-sectional sample, prior training was not independently associated with overall attitudes once school-sector membership was taken into account. This should not be interpreted as evidence that inclusive-education training is ineffective; rather, it suggests that the content, intensity, context, and experiential component of training warrant closer investigation, a reading consonant with Forlin and Chambers (2011), who found that knowledge gains alone, without authentic engagement, may leave concerns untouched.

The Irrelevance of Experience

Years of teaching service showed no association with attitude, whether tested categorically, correlationally, or multivariately. Mere accumulation of general classroom experience appears neither to improve nor to erode attitudes towards inclusion; the group findings are consistent with the possibility that it is the kind of experience, specifically, sustained engagement with learners with disabilities, rather than its duration, that is associated with attitude, though the design cannot confirm this. This null finding is itself of value: attitude formation cannot be left to seniority.

Implications for Policy and Teacher Education

Four implications follow for the Indian context. First, because both cadres already share the philosophy of inclusion, teacher development under the RPWD Act, 2016 and NEP 2020 should shift its centre of gravity from doctrinal advocacy towards structured, supervised contact: practicum placements in inclusive and special settings, co-teaching arrangements, and school-to-school partnerships that give mainstream teachers sustained engagement with learners with



disabilities. Second, the findings support consideration of models in which special educators contribute to mainstream settings through co-teaching, mentoring, and structured cross-school collaboration, though the attitudinal effects of such deployment were not tested here and merit evaluation in their own right. Third, in-service programmes should be evaluated not by attendance but by their capacity to change feelings and perceived efficacy, the dimensions on which the gap is widest. Fourth, because both groups scored lowest, in absolute terms, on the practical-advantages and administrative dimensions, system-level investments in resource support remain indispensable complements to attitudinal work.

7. Limitations

Five limitations qualify the findings. First, the cross-sectional design precludes causal inference: whether special school service produces favourable attitudes or favourable attitudes select teachers into special education cannot be resolved here. Second, because participation depended on schools' agreement and school-level clustering could not be modelled, the sample is not a full probability sample of the teacher population. Third, self-reported attitudes may be inflated by social desirability, though the anonymity of administration mitigates this risk. Fourth, the STATIC measures attitudes towards inclusion generically; attitudes are known to vary by disability type, and their disaggregation by category is a priority for future research, as is longitudinal work tracking attitude change across career transitions between the sectors. Fifth, group membership is confounded with professional role and institutional context: mainstream and special school teachers differ systematically in professional preparation, day-to-day contact, institutional culture, job role, and likely self-selection into the field, so that the group difference reported here summarises an ensemble of correlated influences rather than the effect of school placement alone.

8. Conclusion

In a comparative study of 400 Indian teachers on a validated multidimensional instrument, special school teachers held substantially more favourable attitudes towards inclusive education than mainstream teachers, yet the two cadres proved indistinguishable in their philosophical commitment to inclusion. The gap between them is primarily a gap in feelings and practical confidence, associated with the different professional contexts and forms of experience represented by the two school sectors, and unrelated to years of general teaching experience and, once school-sector membership was taken into account, not independently associated with prior training. For a policy environment committed by statute to inclusion, the message is encouraging and exacting in equal measure: the broad philosophical commitment to inclusion appears well established, while the remaining challenge is to build the affective confidence and practical efficacy required for implementation, through forms of teacher development and institutional support that policy can enable.

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