



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH IN SCIENCE, ENGINEERING AND TECHNOLOGY

Volume 7, Issue 11, November 2024



INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA

Impact Factor: 7.521



6381 907 438



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www.ijmrset.com



International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research in Science, Engineering and Technology (IJMRSET)

(A Monthly, Peer Reviewed, Refereed, Scholarly Indexed, Open Access Journal)

Demographic and Professional Correlates of Teachers' Attitudes Towards Inclusive Education: Evidence from a Comparative Survey of Mainstream and Special School Teachers in India

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ABSTRACT: Although teachers' attitudes are widely recognised as pivotal to the success of inclusive education, comparatively little Indian evidence examines which demographic and professional characteristics of teachers are associated with those attitudes. The present study examined the associations of teaching experience, qualification, school locality, prior training in inclusive education and professional sector (mainstream versus special school) with attitudes towards inclusive education among 400 Indian school teachers (200 mainstream, 200 special school), measured with the Scale of Teachers' Attitudes Toward Inclusive Classrooms (STATIC). Teaching experience, $F(3, 396) = 1.27$, $p = .285$, and school locality, $F(2, 397) = 1.19$, $p = .304$, were not significantly associated with overall attitude. Qualification showed a small omnibus association, $F(4, 395) = 2.89$, $p = .022$, eta-squared = .028, with no pairwise differences surviving Bonferroni correction. A 2×2 factorial analysis of variance revealed a significant main effect of sector, $F(1, 396) = 38.16$, $p < .001$, but no significant main effect of prior training, $F(1, 396) = 0.06$, $p = .80$, and no interaction. Sector and training were strongly associated, chi-square(1, $N = 400$) = 70.37, $p < .001$, Cramer's $V = .42$. In a multiple-regression model (R -squared = .12), sector membership was the only significant predictor of attitude ($B = 0.34$, 95% CI [0.23, 0.44]); training and experience contributed negligibly once sector was controlled. The findings indicate that, among the variables examined, the professional context in which teachers work is far more strongly associated with attitudes than individual demographic characteristics, and that the apparent effect of training is confounded with sector. Implications for the design of teacher preparation and in-service training under the Rehabilitation Council of India framework, the RPWD Act, 2016 and NEP 2020 are discussed.

KEYWORDS: inclusive education; teacher attitudes; STATIC; demographic correlates; teacher training; special education; India

I. INTRODUCTION

The proposition that teachers' attitudes are central to the success of inclusive education is among the most consistently affirmed claims in the international literature (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; de Boer, Pijl, & Minnaert, 2011). Policies may mandate placement, and legislation may confer entitlements, but it is teachers who translate the principle of inclusion into daily classroom practice, and their willingness and confidence to do so are shaped by their attitudes. In India, where the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 and the National Education Policy 2020 have together given inclusive education unprecedented statutory and policy prominence, the question of what shapes teachers' attitudes has acquired direct practical significance for the design of teacher preparation and in-service training.

A substantial body of research has therefore sought to identify the correlates of teachers' attitudes: the demographic and professional characteristics that distinguish teachers with more favourable attitudes from those with less favourable ones. The variables most commonly examined include teaching experience, qualification, training in special or inclusive education, the locality of the school and the professional sector in which the teacher works (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; de Boer et al., 2011; Saloviita, 2020; Van Steen & Wilson, 2020). The findings of this literature are, however, notably inconsistent, and much of it derives from Western contexts whose teacher preparation systems and school structures differ considerably from India's dual system of mainstream schools and special schools, the latter historically staffed by teachers trained under the Rehabilitation Council of India.



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The present study contributes Indian evidence to this question. Drawing on a survey of 400 teachers, evenly divided between mainstream and special schools, it examines the associations of five background variables with attitudes towards inclusive education: teaching experience, highest qualification, school locality, prior training in inclusive education and professional sector. Its distinctive contribution lies in its multivariate treatment of these variables together, which reveals a pattern of considerable practical importance: individual demographic characteristics contribute little to the explanation of attitudes, while the professional sector in which a teacher works is by far the strongest correlate, and the apparent association of training with attitude is substantially confounded with sector. The study is reported from the author's doctoral research.

II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 Experience

The evidence on teaching experience is mixed. Some studies report that more experienced teachers hold less favourable attitudes towards inclusion (Forlin, 1995; Saloviita, 2020), a pattern sometimes attributed to accumulated frustration with under-resourced implementation; others find no significant association (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). The distinction between mere duration of service and the quality of experience appears critical: contact with learners with disabilities that is supported and successful is associated with more favourable attitudes, whereas unsupported contact may entrench reservations (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; de Boer et al., 2011).

2.2 Qualification and Training

Training in special or inclusive education is among the most frequently reported correlates of favourable attitudes. Teachers who have undertaken relevant coursework or professional development typically express greater willingness and confidence to teach in inclusive settings (Sharma, Forlin, & Loreman, 2008; Ahmmed, Sharma, & Deppeler, 2012), and training interventions have produced measurable attitude gains (Sharma & Sokal, 2015). Formal qualification level, by contrast, shows weaker and less consistent associations (de Boer et al., 2011). An interpretive difficulty pervades this literature: in systems where trained teachers are concentrated in particular institutional settings, the effect of training is difficult to separate from the effect of the setting itself, a confound rarely modelled explicitly.

2.3 Locality and Context

School locality has received comparatively little attention, though resource disparities between urban and rural schools might be expected to shape teachers' appraisals of the feasibility of inclusion. Indian studies have documented substantial concerns about resources, class size and support among regular school teachers (Bhatnagar & Das, 2014; Das, Kuyini, & Desai, 2013), and such concerns are plausibly sharper where resources are scarcer, though direct evidence on locality differences in attitude remains thin.

2.4 Professional Sector

Finally, the sector in which a teacher works, mainstream or special, bundles together training, sustained contact with learners with disabilities, institutional culture and self-selection into work with such learners. Comparative studies suggest that special educators typically hold more favourable attitudes towards inclusion than their mainstream counterparts, particularly on affective dimensions (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002), though the two groups often share philosophical commitment to the principle of inclusion. The present study treats sector not as a nuisance variable but as a substantive correlate in its own right, and asks how much of the apparent contribution of the other variables survives once sector is taken into account.

III. METHOD

3.1 Design and Sample

The study employed a descriptive, cross-sectional survey design. The sample comprised 400 practising school teachers, allocated equally to two strata: 200 teachers working in mainstream schools and 200 working in special schools. Sampling proceeded by stratification by school type, followed by the random selection of teachers within participating schools; because participation depended on the schools that agreed to take part, the procedure is best described as stratified non-probability sampling, adequate for the comparison of the two defined groups but not claimed to be representative of the teaching workforce as a whole. The two groups were closely comparable in gender composition (231 women, 169 men overall) and in the broad distribution of experience, and were drawn from urban (n = 167), semi-urban (n = 141) and rural



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($n = 92$) localities. Prior training in inclusive education was reported by 252 respondents, distributed very unevenly across the groups: 167 of 200 special school teachers, against 85 of 200 mainstream teachers.

3.2 Instrument

Attitudes were measured with the Scale of Teachers' Attitudes Toward Inclusive Classrooms (STATIC; Cochran, 1998), a twenty-item instrument answered on a six-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 6 = strongly agree), higher scores denoting more favourable attitudes. The STATIC comprises four sub-scales: advantages and disadvantages of inclusive education, feelings toward inclusion, philosophical beliefs and administrative concerns. In the present sample the overall scale showed good internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .79$) and the four sub-scales high internal consistency ($\alpha = .85$ to $.92$). A brief schedule recorded gender, years of teaching experience, highest qualification, school locality and prior training in inclusive education. Participation was voluntary and responses were anonymous.

3.3 Analytical Strategy

Five sets of analyses were conducted with overall attitude as the outcome: (a) one-way analysis of variance across four experience bands (0–5, 6–10, 11–20, 21+ years); (b) one-way analyses of variance across five qualification categories and three locality categories, with Bonferroni-corrected pairwise comparisons where the omnibus test was significant; (c) a 2 x 2 factorial analysis of variance with sector (mainstream, special) and training (yes, no) as factors, using Type III sums of squares appropriate to the unbalanced design; (d) a chi-square test of the association between sector and training; and (e) a multiple-regression model with teaching experience, sector and training as predictors. Qualification and locality were deliberately excluded from the regression: qualification is unevenly distributed across sectors and therefore confounded with sector, while locality was unrelated to attitude; their bivariate associations are reported separately. Multicollinearity diagnostics for the regression were satisfactory (all VIF at or below 1.22). Because sector is a naturally occurring grouping variable, all coefficients are interpreted as statistical associations rather than causal effects.

IV. RESULTS

4.1 Descriptive Context

Both groups reported favourable attitudes in absolute terms, with means well above the scale mid-point of 3.5: special school teachers $M = 4.99$ ($SD = 0.45$) and mainstream teachers $M = 4.64$ ($SD = 0.49$), a significant difference of medium-to-large size, $t(398) = 7.32$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.73$. The analyses below ask which background variables are associated with variation in these attitudes.

4.2 Teaching Experience

A one-way analysis of variance across the four experience bands revealed no significant differences, $F(3, 396) = 1.27$, $p = .285$, $\eta^2 = .01$. Correlations between experience and the four sub-scales were likewise negligible, ranging from $-.09$ to $.04$. Years of service, considered in isolation, were not significantly associated with attitude in this sample; given the sample's good power for detecting small-to-moderate effects, this null result indicates that any true association of duration of experience with attitude in this population is at most small.

4.3 Qualification and Locality

For qualification, the omnibus test revealed a small but statistically significant association, $F(4, 395) = 2.89$, $p = .022$, $\eta^2 = .028$, accounting for under three per cent of variance. Bonferroni-corrected pairwise comparisons identified no pair of qualification groups that differed significantly (all adjusted $p > .05$); the appropriate conclusion is therefore held at the level of the omnibus test. Notably, the pattern of means did not show a simple ordering by level or specialisation of qualification (Table 1), and holders of specialist special-education qualifications did not record the highest means. For locality, no significant differences emerged among urban, semi-urban and rural teachers, $F(2, 397) = 1.19$, $p = .304$, $\eta^2 = .006$.

Table 1. Mean Overall Attitude by Qualification (N = 400)

Qualification	n	M	SD
B.Ed	116	4.90	0.45
B.Ed Spl.Ed	75	4.72	0.50



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M.Ed	100	4.88	0.50
M.Ed Spl.Ed	62	4.69	0.61
Other	47	4.79	0.45

4.4 Sector, Training and Their Joint Effect

A 2 x 2 factorial analysis of variance with sector and training as factors revealed a significant main effect of sector, $F(1, 396) = 38.16$, $p < .001$, but no significant main effect of training, $F(1, 396) = 0.06$, $p = .80$, and no significant interaction, $F(1, 396) = 0.31$, $p = .58$. The cell means (Table 2) show why: within each sector, teachers with and without prior training differed only trivially, while the difference between sectors was substantial at both levels of training. The apparent advantage of trained over untrained teachers in an unadjusted comparison is thus carried substantially by the concentration of trained teachers in the special school sector rather than by any large effect of training within either sector.

Table 2. Cell Means for the Sector x Training Design (Overall Attitude)

Sector	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

The association between sector and training was itself strong and highly significant, chi-square(1, $N = 400$) = 70.37, $p < .001$ (with Yates's continuity correction), Cramer's $V = .42$, a substantial effect. Special school teachers were far more likely than mainstream teachers to have received prior training in inclusive education. Sector and training are therefore deeply confounded in these data, as they are in the Indian teacher workforce these data reflect, and the design does not permit an independent estimate of a training effect.

4.5 Multivariate Analysis

The multiple-regression model with experience, sector and training as predictors was statistically significant, $F(3, 396) = 18.38$, $p < .001$, and accounted for approximately 12 per cent of the variance in overall attitude (R -squared = .12, adjusted R -squared = .12). As Table 3 shows, sector membership was by far the strongest predictor and the only one to reach significance once the others were held constant: working in a special school 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 sector was controlled, $B = 0.02$, 95% CI [-0.08, 0.13], $p = .678$, and teaching experience a negligible, non-significant association, $B = -0.01$, 95% CI [-0.02, 0.00], $p = .234$.

Table 3. Multiple Regression Predicting Overall Attitude ($N = 400$)

Predictor	B	SE	95% CI	t	p
Constant	4.68	0.06	[4.57, 4.80]	78.06	< .001
Teaching experience	-0.01	0.01	[-0.02, 0.00]	-1.19	.234
Special (vs Mainstream)	0.34	0.05	[0.23, 0.44]	6.43	< .001
Trained (vs Untrained)	0.02	0.05	[-0.08, 0.13]	0.42	.678



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V. DISCUSSION

5.1 The Weak Contribution of Individual Demographics

The first conclusion of this study is negative but consequential: among the demographic variables examined, none was substantially associated with teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education. Experience showed no significant association, echoing the inconsistency of the international literature and suggesting that, in this sample at least, favourable or unfavourable attitudes are not simply a function of years in service. Locality likewise showed no association, indicating that the attitudinal profile of teachers was broadly similar across urban, semi-urban and rural schools. Qualification showed only a small omnibus association without interpretable pairwise differences, and the absence of an advantage for specialist qualifications is noteworthy: possession of a special-education degree, as distinct from working in a special-education setting, was not associated with more favourable attitudes. Attitudes, these results suggest, are not well predicted by the static characteristics recorded on a teacher's service record.

5.2 The Primacy of Professional Context

Against this backdrop, the strength of the sector effect stands out. Working in a special school was associated with an attitude advantage of about a third of a scale point, a difference of medium-to-large standardised magnitude, and it remained the only significant predictor in the multivariate model. Sector membership is best understood not as a single variable but as a package: sustained and purposive contact with learners with disabilities, an institutional culture organised around their education, colleagues with relevant expertise and self-selection into the work. The finding that this package, rather than any individual characteristic, carries the attitudinal difference is consistent with contact-theoretic and social-cognitive accounts in which supported, successful professional experience with learners with disabilities builds the confidence and positive affect that favourable attitudes express (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; de Boer et al., 2011). Because the design is cross-sectional, the association may also reflect selection: teachers with more favourable dispositions may be more likely to enter and remain in special education. Both processes are plausible and they are not mutually exclusive.

5.3 The Sector-Training Confound and Its Policy Significance

Perhaps the most instructive finding concerns training. Considered without adjustment, trained teachers appear more favourable than untrained teachers; modelled jointly with sector, training contributes nothing significant, and within each sector trained and untrained teachers are nearly indistinguishable. The explanation lies in the strong association between sector and training: in India's dual system, training in special and inclusive education has historically been concentrated among special school teachers, so that any effect of training is absorbed into, and cannot be separated from, the effect of sector. This is a statement about these data and this design, not a demonstration that training is ineffective; intervention studies show that well-designed training can shift attitudes (Sharma & Sokal, 2015). But it carries a clear implication for how correlational findings on training should be read, in this study and in the wider literature: where trained teachers are institutionally concentrated, unadjusted comparisons of trained and untrained teachers overstate what training alone can claim.

For policy, the pattern suggests that the mere certification of mainstream teachers, training detached from the professional context in which attitudes appear to be formed, may be an insufficient lever. The variables that travel with sector, including sustained supported contact with learners with disabilities, expert colleagues and an institutional culture of inclusion, are the plausible active ingredients, and they can in principle be built into mainstream schools: through resource support, mentoring by special educators, structured collaboration between mainstream and special institutions, and practicum components that give mainstream teachers extended, supported experience of teaching learners with disabilities. These directions align with the provisions of the RPWD Act, 2016 on the training and deployment of special educators and with the NEP 2020's emphasis on preparing all teachers for inclusive classrooms.

5.4 Limitations

Five limitations qualify these conclusions. First, the design is cross-sectional, and no causal claims are advanced; sector differences may reflect socialisation, selection, or both. Second, the sampling was stratified but non-probability in character, and equal allocation of the two sectors, while maximising power for comparison, does not mirror the population, so findings should be read as a comparison of two defined groups rather than as population estimates. Third, because school identifiers were not recorded, possible clustering of teachers within schools could not be modelled, and inferential precision should be read with corresponding caution. Fourth, training was recorded as a binary self-report, without information on its type, duration or quality, which limits what the null adjusted association can say about training



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as such. Fifth, the strong sector-training confound, while itself a finding, means the design cannot estimate an independent training effect; disentangling the two would require sampling designs that secure adequate numbers of trained mainstream and untrained special school teachers, or longitudinal designs that follow teachers across training and placement.

VI. CONCLUSION

Among 400 Indian teachers, attitudes towards inclusive education were not significantly associated with teaching experience or school locality, and only weakly and uninterpretable with qualification. The professional sector in which teachers work was by far the strongest correlate of attitude, and prior training was not independently associated with attitude once sector membership was taken into account, reflecting the deep confounding of training and sector in India's dual system of mainstream and special schools. The findings direct attention away from teachers' static demographic characteristics and towards the professional contexts in which attitudes are formed, and they suggest that efforts to prepare mainstream teachers for inclusion should embed training within supported, contact-rich professional experience rather than treating certification alone as the instrument of attitude change.

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