

Attitude towards Inclusive Education (IE) among Prospective Teachers: Is there Gender Polarization?

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Abstract. It could be said that gender is an ever-present variable when investigations of attitude towards Inclusive Education are accounted for. It could be deduced that the investigation of attitude and gender remains a relevant research activity, especially that the teacher course and the teaching career are dominated by one gender group. Thus, utilizing a reliable research tool ($\alpha = 0.90$), this current empirical, cross-sectional study embarked on measuring the attitude towards IE of pre-service teachers, and determined whether gender

polarization with respect to attitude exists. The study revealed intriguing results. Moreover, it was noted that if teachers would take an indifferent attitude towards IE, mainstreaming would not become as successful as it should be, and that the concept 'Education for All' shall remain elusive, and nothing but a mere dream resting in the minds of those who should do better.

Keywords: Inclusive Education, Gender, Attitude, Teachers

Introduction

Attitude towards Inclusive Education, synonymously understood with the terms integration, and mainstreaming (Chhabra et al., 2010), is one of the extensively researched topics. As proof, numerous studies were conducted in previous years across different respondents - Special Education Teachers (Alharthi & Evans, 2017), Primary Teachers (Opoku et al., 2021), Prospective Language Teachers (Ataç & Taşçı, 2020), Kindergarten Teachers (Scanlon et al., 2022), and Pre-service Teachers (Ahsan et al., 2012; Costello & Boyle, 2013; Hamid & Mohamed, 2021; Hassanein, 2021; Nouf et al., 2020). Noticeably, although the list is noted to be nonexhaustive, research works were mainly directed towards pre-service and in-service teachers. It could be deduced that the teachers are acknowledged to play a significant role in the implementation and success of IE, hence the preponderance of studies on the topic among them.

Notably, as education is considered as a 'great social equalizer' (Singh, 2020, p.189), a poverty-alleviating tool (Opoku et al., 2021), and a means to battle unemployment (Priyadarshini & Thangarajathi, 2017), teachers, on the hand, are key players in its realization and access. Moreover, teachers are recognized to play significant roles with respect to the whole educational system, and the extent of their influence could never be overemphasized.

One most investigated variable with respect to teachers and IE is attitude, identified to be a significant concept in education (Şimşek & Müldür, 2020). One of the widely accepted definitions is advanced by Ajzen (2005) which states that attitude is a form of disposition towards a person, thing, idea or event.

However, among scholars, attitude has been conceived differently (Somblingo & Alieto, 2019). Consequently, authors are yet to come to a consensus as regards its definition. Bohner and Wanke (2002) maintained that it is a form of evaluation or assessment. Yıldız and Kızıldaş (2018) held that attitude is a stance, reaction and tendency. For Lim and Jung (2019), attitude relates to one's feeling defining how one would approach or avoid the attitudinal object.

Despite the existence of conceptual variations about attitude, it is supposed that attitudinal studies are conducted on the premise that attitude is a predictor of behavior (Alieto et al., 2020), and may function as either an enabling or disabling factor (Alieto, 2018). With this, attitude as a research topic has attracted scholars; in fact, it has been claimed to be a topic of interest among academicians (Eijansantos et al., 2020). Moreover, the study of attitude towards IE is essentially important because teachers' attitude is one major determinant factor of either the success or failure of IE (Martinez, 2003).

As regards the findings of the study, different studies present different results. Hwang and Evans (2010) disclosed that, on average, the general education students manifest a positive attitude towards IE. The study further claimed that the respondents are divided in terms of their attitude towards IE, and those who do not favor IE are slightly outnumbered by those who do. Similarly, the studies of Ahsan et al. (2012), Costello and Boyle (2013), Ediyanto et al. (2021), Nouf et al. (2020), Singh et al. (2020), and Hamid and Mohamed (2021) have also confirmed the existence of slightly positive to positive attitude towards IE. However, such finding characterizing respondents' attitude to be favorable has not been consistently supported by other studies. There are also studies that reported otherwise such as the investigation of Scanlon et al. (2022) which divulged that the kindergarten teachers manifested a negative affective attitude towards IE. In a similar vein, Chhabra et al. (2010) reported that the teachers' manifest negative attitude towards IE, with numerous of them feeling unprepared and fearful of handling children with disabilities. Another is the study of Alieto and Caspillo (2022) among teacher candidates. They found out that the teachers from non-metropolitan areas are manifesting a 'somehow negative' attitude. The authors claimed that the result was due to the fact that the idea of IE remains to be emerging in the area despite being a popular trend (Nunez & Rosales, 2021).

At this point, it is remarked that, as noted from the literature, gender influence on the attitude towards IE is a research concern. This proves the point of Buslon et al. (2020, p.45) that gender appears to be an 'ever-present' factor investigated alongside other research variables and constructs. This explains the numerous studies conducted on IE juxtaposed with the variable gender (e.g., Singh et al., 2020; Orakcı et al., 2016).

Most of the studies reported gender to bear neutral effects. The study of Orakcı et al. (2016) found out that the male and female respondents do not significantly vary in their attitude towards IE. A similar result was also yielded by the study of Ediyanto et al. (2021) among 243 Indonesian teachers. An additional is the investigation of Hamid and Mohamed (2021) which identified that there is no substantial difference in the attitude towards IE among future faculty members when data were grouped across gender categories (male and female).

The inconsistency of results in the attitude towards IE, and the influence of gender suggests the need for more studies to be conducted in the said area of investigation. This current study was conducted not with the aim of merely debunking previous findings, nor simply to confirm prior results.

Instead, this study aimed to contribute in the field of research a contextualized result accounting the unique characteristic of the chosen respondents who are pre-service teachers from a developing country, and geographically set away from metropolitan cities. Additionally, the study intended to identify whether or not gender is a factor statistically influencing respondents' attitude towards IE – to contribute an essential result on the existence or non-existence of gender divide in the investigated variable.

Methodology

Research Design

The study utilized a descriptive-quantitative research design. The study is identified to be a quantitative type of research as it intended to quantify the hypothetical variable attitude towards IE, and it aimed to determine whether or not a statistical difference exists in the attitude towards IE across gender which necessitates the use of an inferential statistics.

Additionally, the study is noted to be descriptive as it performed the characterization of the respondents' attitude towards IE through the use of descriptive statistics limited to Mean [M] and Standard Deviation [SD].

The research tool

The study utilized the Teachers' Attitudes towards Inclusive Education developed by Saloviita (2015). The instrument was originally intended to measure pre-service teacher' attitude towards IE, and was used towards the mentioned respondent type by studies (e.g., Alieto & Caspillo, 2022).

Nonetheless, the same tool was utilized by different studies to sample among in-service teachers too (e.g., Hoadjli & Latrache, 2020).

Ten items compose the research tool which is answerable with a five-point Likert scale, and with a declared reliability score of $\alpha = 0.90$.

Respondents

The respondents of the study are pre-service teachers, both future elementary-school and prospective high-school teachers. A total of 947 respondents constitute the sample. The female respondents compose about 75.6% sample size.

The youngest male and female respondents are aged 17. The oldest among male pre-service teachers is aged 36, while the oldest among female pre-service teachers is aged 38. The mean age is 21.65 (SD-3.03).

Data Collection Procedure

Data gathering of the study was realized for about three months, from April to June, 2021. The full data collection was performed via online, as travel during the mentioned period is limited due to the spread of the COVID-19; hence, the nominated means of data gathering was determined most appropriate at that time.

The adopted instrument was digitized using Google form. After the digitization of the instrument, it was proofread for language accuracy before having the same sent to the different respondents.

Respondents were given three weeks to respond to the questionnaire. A reminder was sent to the respondents five days before the set deadline.

At the culmination of the three-week allotted time, at midnight, the form was closed, and receiving of responses ended. The responses were retrieved using a spreadsheet. The data set was first cleansed for misentries. After the cleansing process has been completed, the data set was transferred to SPSS for analysis by a statistician.

Data Coding Procedure

Coding of the responses was performed to enable the analysis of the data using SPSS. For responses in the four positive statements, the coding is as follows: 1 for Strongly Disagree [SD], 2 for Disagree [D], 3 for Neither agree nor disagree [N], 4 for Agree [A], and 5 Strongly Agree [SA]. Reversed coding was employed for the six negative statements.

To determine overall extent of agreement for each item and for the groupings of statements (statement supporting IE [positive statements] and statements against IE [negative statements]), the scale used for positive statements is follows: 1.0 to 1.79 (Strongly Disagree), 1.8 to 2.59 (Disagree) 2.6 to 3.39 (Neither agree nor disagree), 3.4 to 4.19 (Agree), and 4.2 to 5.0 (Strongly Agree). The reverse was utilized for negative statements.

On another note, the scale used to interpret the mean scores per item and the overall mean is as follows: 1.0 to 1.79 (Negative Attitude), 1.8 to 2.59 (Somehow Negative Attitude) 2.6 to 3.39 (Neutral), 3.4 to 4.19 (Somehow Positive), and 4.2 to 5.0 (Positive Attitude).

Furthermore, gender was coded as 1 for male and 2 for female.

Result and Discussion

Respondents' overall attitude towards Inclusive Education

To enable the descriptive analysis needed to answer the first research question of the study, the data drawn from the administered questionnaire were first coded (reversed coding was employed with negative items of the research tool), and transferred to a spreadsheet.

Cleansing of the data was first performed. Responses with errors were considered ineligible for analysis; hence, removed. The cleansed data set was analyzed using descriptive statistics – mean [M] and standard deviation [SD]. Table 1 provides the analysis. Included in the presentation are the minimum (Min.), maximum (Max.), description (Desc.), and Interpretation (Interp.).

Table 1

Pre-service Teachers' overall Attitude towards Inclusive Education

	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD	Desc.	Interp.
Statements Supporting IE (Positive Statements)	1.17	4.83	2.327	1.068	Disagree	Somehow Negative Attitude
Statements Against IE (Negative Statements)	1.0	5.0	2.909	1.177	Neither agree nor disagree	Neutral
Overall Attitude towards Inclusive Education	1.3	4.9	2.560	1.004	Somehow Negative Attitude	

Scale: 1.0 to 1.79 (Negative Attitude), 1.8 to 2.59 (Somehow Negative Attitude) 2.6 to 3.39 (Neutral), 3.4 to 4.19 (Somehow Positive), and 4.2 to 5.0 (Positive Attitude).

The above Table presents the mean scores for the responses of the pre-service teachers on the positive and negative statements in the questionnaire. In addition, it could also be gleaned that the overall attitude of the respondents towards IE is provided.

The analysis revealed that the respondents, on the average, disagree with statements that favor IE, while remain neutral with statements that go against IE. Generally, the respondents are noted to manifest an attitude leaning towards being negative.

Respondents' responses in the positive statements towards Inclusive Education

To determine the extent of agreement of the respondents in the different positive statements towards Inclusive Education, frequency count of responses across the five Likert scales was employed. Moreover, mean score analysis per item was conducted. Table 1.1 shows the result.

Table 1.1

Pre-service Teachers' extent of agreement on the positive statements of the questionnaire

#	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Interp.
2	The education of children with emotional and behavioural problems should be arranged in mainstream classrooms with the provision of adequate support.						
	324 (63%)	108 (21%)	-	27 (5.3%)	55 (10.7%)	1.795	Negative Attitude
4	Children with attention deficit/hyperactive disorder (ADHD) should be admitted in mainstream classrooms with adequate support.						
	135 (26.3%)	135 (26.%)	54 (10.5%)	109 (21.2%)	81 (15.8%)	2.739	Neutral
7	The education of students with special educational needs should be arranged as far as possible in mainstream classrooms.						
	81 (15.8%)	135 (26.3%)	109 (21.2%)	108 (21.0%)	81 (15.8%)	2.948	Somehow Negative Attitude
10	The learning of children with special educational needs can be effectively supported in mainstream classrooms as well.						
	135 (26.3%)	108 (21%)	27 (5.3%)	163 (31.7%)	81 (15.8)	2.896	Neutral
Overall						2.909	Neutral

Scale: 1.0 to 1.79 (Negative Attitude), 1.8 to 2.59 (Somehow Negative Attitude) 2.6 to 3.39 (Neutral), 3.4 to 4.19 (Somehow Positive), and 4.2 to 5.0 (Positive Attitude).

Out of the four items, the least rated is number 2 with more than half (63%) of the respondents disagreeing with it, suggesting respondents' negative attitude towards the idea of having children with emotional and behavioral problems integrated in regular classes. Interestingly, it is only in item 2 that none of the respondents has provided a neutral stance.

However, it could be noted in two items (numbers 4 and 10) the respondents' overall mean is interpreted as 'neutral'. This does not however mean that the majority of the respondents responded to be neutral in the said items.

Instead, it could be understood from the data provided that the respondents are polarized in their takes or stances, especially in item number 10 which gained 47.3% of total responses geared towards being not favorable about the said statement while 47.5% of the responses favoring the same.

Respondents' responses in the negative statements towards Inclusive Education

Frequency count was performed for the determination of the extent of agreement of the respondents on the different negative items in the research tool.

Moreover, the count of responses was also translated into percent for a more comprehensive presentation. Table 1.2 provides the analysis.

Table 1.2

Pre-service Teachers' extent of agreement on the negative statements of the questionnaire

#	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean	Interp.
1	Children with special educational needs learn best in their own special education classes where they have specially trained teachers.						
	324 (63%)	108 (21%)	-	27 (5.3%)	55 (10.7%)	1.790	Negative Attitude
3	It is the right of a child with special educational needs to get into a special education classroom.						
	324 (63%)	81 (5.1%)	27 (5.3%)	-	82 (16%)	1.901	Somehow Negative
5	Teachers' workload should not be augmented by compelling them to accept children with special educational needs in their classrooms.						
	81 (15.8%)	81 (15.8%)	136 (26.5%)	189 (36.8%)	27 (5.3%)	3.0	Neutral
6	The best result is achieved if each child with special educational needs is placed in a special education classroom that best suits him/her.						
	243 (47.3%)	162 (31.5%)	27 (5.3%)	55 (10.7%)	27 (5.3%)	1.951	Somehow Negative
8	Integrated children with special educational needs create extra work for teachers in mainstream classrooms.						

	108 (21%)	243 (47.3%)	27 (5.3%)	82 (16%)	54 (10.5%)	2.477	Somehow Negative Attitude
9	A child with special educational needs should be moved to a special education classroom in order not to violate his/her legal rights.						
	81 (15.8%)	162 (31.5%)	109 (21.2%)	81 (15.8%)	81 (15.8%)	2.842	Neutral
Overall						2.560	Somehow Negative Attitude

Scale: 1.0 to 1.79 (Negative Attitude), 1.8 to 2.59 (Somehow Negative Attitude) 2.6 to 3.39 (Neutral), 3.4 to 4.19 (Somehow Positive), and 4.2 to 5.0 (Positive Attitude).

From the Table above, it could be noticed that it is in items 1 and 3 that more than half (63%) of the respondents expressed strong agreement with. Intriguingly, in five out of the six negative items, the majority of the respondents expressed their approval (they have responded either Agree and Strongly Agree)– 1 (84%), 3 (68.1%), 6 (78.8%), 8 (68.3%), and 9 (47.3%).

It is only in item number 5 that there are more respondents disapproving (42.1%) the statement than approving it (31.6%). Generally, the respondents of the study agree with the different negative statements that do not support inclusion of special children in regular classrooms which suggests an attitude described as ‘somehow negative’.

Pre-service Teachers’ Attitude towards Inclusive Education : Gender Differences

To determine whether or not a statistical difference exists in the attitude towards Inclusive Education among the respondents, the collected data were subject for analysis. The variable gender was first coded as 1 for male and 2 for female. Moreover, the inferential, parametric tool known as Independent-samples T-test was utilized. Table 2 gives the analysis.

Table 2

Pre-service Teachers’ Attitude towards Inclusive Education across genders

Variables		Mean	SD	Desc.	Interp.	Sig. (2-tailed)
Dependent	Independent					
Statements Supporting IE (Positive Statements)	Male	2.389	0.893	Neither agree nor disagree	Somehow Negative Attitude	0.380
	Female	2.300	1.140	Neither agree nor disagree	Somehow Negative Attitude	
Statements Against IE (Negative Statements)	Male	3.458	0.772	Disagree	Somehow Positive	0.000*
	Female	2.657	1.244	Neither agree nor disagree	Neutral	

Overall Attitude towards Inclusive Education	Male	2.817	0.606	Neutral	0.000*
	Female	2.443	1.124	Somehow Negative Attitude	

N – Males (162), Females (352); * significant at $\alpha = 0.001$

It could be noted from the above table that with respect to the extent of agreement on the different statements supporting IE the male and female respondents do not significantly differ. However, the same is contrary with statements that do not advance or rally for IE.

The male respondents, in general, are expressing disagreement while the females are neutral in their stance. As regards attitude toward IE, the analysis revealed that there is significant difference with the males exhibiting a neutral attitude while the females a ‘somehow negative’ attitude.

Discussion

The study is one with other investigations aiming to continuously provide essential and research-drawn results and findings which could be used to support practices advancing the cause of Inclusive Education. The study surveyed Prospective Teachers who are argued to soon play important roles in the success of IE as they would become, in the immediate future, in-service teachers who are main implementers of educational programs and policies.

The study presented intriguing results. The most intriguing is that the prospective teachers exhibit a ‘somehow negative’ attitude towards IE. The noted attitude presents itself to be peculiar when compared to the attitude manifested by previously surveyed in-service and pre-service teachers. Survey of literature provides that most of the conducted attitudinal investigations reported that the respondents possess a type of attitude that leans towards being positive or those that to an extent favor Inclusive Education (e.g., Ahsan et al. 2012; Costello & Boyle, 2013; Ediyanto et al., 2021; Nouf et al., 2020; Singh et al., 2020; Hamid & Mohamed, 2021; Hwang & Evans, 2010). It is remarked, however, that there are studies that resonate the same result such as the investigations of Chhabra et al. (2010) and Alieto and Caspillo (2022). The researchers have claimed that the identified attitude, which does not favor IE, is due to different apprehensions related to the preparedness in handling children with disabilities (Chhabra et al., 2010).

On another hand, Alieto and Caspillo (2022) supposed that the lack of awareness about what IE and its ideals are the reason explaining the determined non favoring attitude towards IE. The researchers note the contention of Alieto and Caspillo (2022) that the IE remains to be an emerging concept among pre-service teachers in some areas, despite the acknowledgment that IE is a global trend. It is further supposed that the lack of awareness among pre-service teachers stems from the idea that the teacher education curriculum remains to give little emphasis on such an important concept.

Regrettably, it is purported that the pre-service teachers may have simply reflected the attitude of their teachers towards IE as teachers’ attitude could influence students’ attitude; hence, it is strongly suggested that a follow up study should be conducted. Comparing the attitudes between the mentors and pre-service would be a good thing to do.

At any rate, this result suggests that pre-service teachers should be given exposure or be engaged in activities that would enhance their attitude towards IE. It is a good thing that the attitude of future educators towards IE does not remain unchecked, instead investigated and characterized as what was done in this study.

Although the result was something not expected nor hoped for, there remains something favorable in the discovery of it – the identification of a concern that needs to be addressed the soonest possible time. This could allow the ‘nipping in the bud’, because it is assumed that altering the attitude of pre-service teachers would prove to be more challenging when the such attitude has completely ‘bloomed’ already. AT this point, it is worth echoing the suggestion of Rosales and Rosales (2019) that workshops and conferences capacitating teachers to handle special children should be sponsored and provided by academic institutions.

Another equally intriguing result is that gender is a significantly influencing factor affecting attitude towards IE. The detailed analysis of the research tools provides that the males significantly differ in the extent of agreement with statements that do not favor IE as compared to females. The males , in general, are expressing disagreement while the females are remaining neutral, neither agreeing or disagreeing.

The study revealed that there is a difference in the attitude towards IE between the males and females , and that the difference is pointed out to be statistically significant. For the overall attitude towards IE, the males are neutral while females are manifesting an attitude geared towards being negative. It is claimed that the finding suggests that the females are more apprehensive about the mainstreaming of children with special needs than the males. Perhaps, the females of the study perceived themselves to be more unprepared and uncapacitated in dealing with children with special needs than their male counterparts. However, as the overall attitude of the male respondents is identified to be ‘neutral’ and those of the female respondents, in general, ‘somehow negative’, it could be clearly understood that the claim of polarized attitude is nonexistent as far as the results of the study are accounted for. Nonetheless, the study proved that there is gender difference in the attitude towards IE, but not polarized. Additionally, it is worrisome to acknowledge that both the male and females, generally, do not manifest an attitude suggestive of favoring IE.

The result of the study pointing at female pre-service teachers possessing a ‘somehow negative’ attitude should be addressed accordingly. Studies have identified that the teacher education course and the teaching career is a female’s domain (e.g., Abequibel et al., 2021; Alieto & Rillo, 2018; Torres & Alieto, 2019; Mumbing et al., 2021; Perez & Alieto, 2018; Ricohermoso et al., 2019).

Therefore, the stance of the females towards IE greatly matters. It is remarked that teachers who have a negative attitude towards IE would likely be the ones who would resist integration at the classroom level. Even with the existence of a policy or a law, program and policy implementation happen inside classrooms where teachers possess great authority. Therefore, the efficient implementation of most educational programs and policies happen at the level of classroom teachers. Hence, if teachers take an indifferent attitude towards IE,

mainstreaming would not be as successful as it should become, and that the concept 'Education for All' shall remain elusive, and nothing but a mere dream resting in the minds of those who should do better.

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