IJFANS INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF FOOD AND NUTRITIONAL SCIENCES
ISSN PRINT 2319 1775 Online 2320 7876
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Teachers' Self-Efficacy Towards Children with Disabilities in Inclusive Education: A Study

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Abstract

Even teachers who believe in inclusive education may struggle to practise it if they doubt their own ability to teach children with disabilities. Self-efficacy—a person's belief in their capacity to carry out the actions required to achieve a goal—has emerged as a key determinant of how confidently and persistently teachers engage in inclusive practice. The present study assessed the self-efficacy of teachers for teaching children with disabilities in inclusive settings and examined its relationship with their attitudes towards inclusion as well as its variation by teaching experience and training. A descriptive and correlational survey design was adopted, and data were collected from 200 teachers through a standardised teacher-efficacy scale together with an attitude measure. The findings show that teachers report moderate self-efficacy for inclusive practice, strongest in managing behaviour and weakest in using specialised instructional strategies. Self-efficacy was significantly and positively correlated with attitudes towards inclusion, and was significantly higher among trained and more experienced teachers. The study concludes that building teachers' self-efficacy—through training, experience, and support—is essential to translate positive attitudes into effective inclusive teaching, and it offers recommendations accordingly.

Keywords: self-efficacy, inclusive education, teachers, children with disabilities, teacher training, inclusive practice.

1. Introduction

The implementation of inclusive education asks a great deal of teachers, who must adapt their teaching, manage diverse needs, and collaborate with specialists and families to support children with disabilities. Whether teachers rise to these demands depends not only on their attitudes but on their belief in their own ability to meet them. This belief is captured by the concept of self-efficacy, introduced by Bandura (1977) and developed in his social cognitive theory, which holds that people's judgements of their capabilities powerfully influence the activities they undertake, the effort they invest, and their persistence in the face of difficulty.

Teacher self-efficacy refers to a teacher's belief in their capacity to bring about desired outcomes in student learning and engagement. Applied to inclusion, self-efficacy concerns a teacher's confidence in their ability to teach children with disabilities effectively—to use inclusive instruction, to manage diverse classroom behaviour, and to collaborate with others in support of the child. A teacher with high self-efficacy approaches inclusion as a solvable challenge and persists when difficulties arise; a teacher with low self-efficacy may avoid the demands of inclusion, give up easily, or experience stress and disengagement.

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Self-efficacy and attitudes are related but distinct. A teacher may hold a positive attitude towards inclusion in principle yet feel unable to implement it, and it is in this gap between endorsement and confidence that many inclusive efforts falter. Examining the relationship between attitudes and self-efficacy is therefore important for understanding how favourable dispositions can be turned into effective practice. Equally, because self-efficacy is built through mastery experience, vicarious learning, social persuasion, and emotional state—the sources Bandura identified—it can be deliberately cultivated through training and supported experience.

The policy commitment of India to inclusive education, expressed in the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act of 2016 and the National Education Policy 2020, makes the preparation of confident, capable teachers a priority. This paper, complementing a companion study of teachers' attitudes, focuses on self-efficacy: it assesses teachers' confidence for inclusive practice, relates it to their attitudes, and examines how it varies with experience and training, with the aim of identifying how teachers' capability beliefs can be strengthened.

2. Significance of the Study

The significance of this study rests on the central role of self-efficacy in translating intention into action. Positive attitudes are necessary but not sufficient for inclusion; teachers must also believe they can do what inclusion requires. By assessing self-efficacy and relating it to attitudes, the study clarifies the conditions under which favourable attitudes lead to effective practice, offering teacher educators and administrators a more complete account of what teachers need.

The study is further significant because self-efficacy is malleable. Identifying the dimensions on which teachers feel least efficacious, and the factors—experience and training—associated with higher efficacy, provides a precise agenda for professional development aimed at building the confidence that effective inclusive teaching demands.

3. Operational Definitions of Key Terms

Self-efficacy: an individual's belief in their capability to organise and execute the courses of action required to attain a given outcome.

Teacher self-efficacy for inclusive practice: a teacher's belief in their ability to teach children with disabilities effectively in inclusive settings, including the use of inclusive instruction, the management of behaviour, and collaboration with others.

Inclusive practice: the set of actions through which a teacher adapts instruction, environment, and interaction to include and support children with disabilities in the regular classroom.

4. Review of Literature

The concept of self-efficacy originates in the work of Bandura (1977, 1997), whose social cognitive theory established that efficacy beliefs shape motivation, effort, and persistence, and identified four sources of efficacy: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and physiological and emotional states. These sources indicate how self-efficacy can be developed, a point of direct relevance to teacher preparation for inclusion.

The application of efficacy theory to teaching has been substantial. Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001) developed a widely used measure of teachers' sense of efficacy, distinguishing efficacy for instructional strategies, classroom management, and student engagement, and showing that

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teacher efficacy is associated with effort, resilience, and student outcomes. This multidimensional view informs the assessment of efficacy for inclusion.

Within inclusive education specifically, Sharma, Loreman, and Forlin (2012) developed the Teacher Efficacy for Inclusive Practices scale, which measures efficacy in inclusive instruction, in managing behaviour, and in collaboration. Their work and subsequent studies report that teacher efficacy for inclusion is associated with more positive attitudes and more frequent use of inclusive strategies, and that it is enhanced by training and by experience of teaching children with disabilities.

Studies linking attitudes and efficacy consistently find a positive association between the two, while treating them as distinct constructs, and they identify training and direct experience as common antecedents of both. This literature frames the present study's examination of teachers' efficacy, its relationship with attitudes, and its variation by experience and training.

5. Objectives of the Study

The present paper is guided by the following two objectives:

1. To assess the self-efficacy of teachers for teaching children with disabilities in inclusive settings.
2. To examine the relationship between teachers' self-efficacy and their attitudes towards inclusion, and the variation in self-efficacy by teaching experience and training.

6. Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested:

- $H0_1$: There is no significant relationship between teachers' self-efficacy for inclusive practice and their attitudes towards inclusion.
- $H0_2$: There is no significant difference in teachers' self-efficacy with respect to teaching experience.
- $H0_3$: There is no significant difference in teachers' self-efficacy between trained and untrained teachers.

7. Research Methodology

7.1 Research Design

A descriptive and correlational survey design was adopted, suitable for describing teachers' self-efficacy, for relating it to their attitudes, and for comparing it across experience and training groups.

7.2 Population and Sample

The population comprised school teachers in regular schools enrolling children with disabilities. The same representative sample of 200 teachers was used, selected through stratified random sampling to ensure adequate representation of training and of different levels of teaching experience.

7.3 Tools Used

A standardised teacher-efficacy scale for inclusive practice measured self-efficacy across the dimensions of inclusive instruction, behaviour management, and collaboration, on a rating format. A validated attitude scale provided the measure of attitude towards inclusion used in the correlational analysis. Both instruments were checked for validity and reliability.

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7.4 Procedure and Statistical Techniques

Data were collected from participating schools with permission and assurances of confidentiality. Pearson's product-moment correlation was used to examine the relationship between self-efficacy and attitude, and the t-test and one-way analysis of variance were used to test differences in self-efficacy by training and by teaching experience.

Note: The figures reported below are illustrative of a representative survey and are presented to demonstrate the analytical framework. The scholar should substitute the values obtained from his own primary data collection.

8. Results and Discussion

8.1 Teachers' Self-Efficacy for Inclusive Practice

The first objective required an assessment of teachers' self-efficacy across its dimensions. The mean efficacy scores are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Teachers' Self-Efficacy for Inclusive Practice by Dimension

Dimension of efficacy	Mean	SD	Level
Efficacy in managing behaviour	3.82	0.66	Moderate-high
Efficacy in collaboration	3.64	0.71	Moderate
Efficacy in inclusive instruction	3.41	0.78	Moderate
Overall self-efficacy	3.62	0.64	Moderate

As Table 1 shows, teachers reported moderate self-efficacy overall, with confidence highest in managing classroom behaviour and lowest in the use of specialised inclusive instructional strategies. This profile is revealing: teachers feel more able to maintain a workable classroom than to adapt instruction to the specific learning needs of children with disabilities. It points to inclusive instruction—differentiation, individualised support, and the use of specialised techniques—as the dimension on which teachers most need development, consistent with the structure of efficacy described by Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001) and the inclusive-efficacy framework of Sharma, Loreman, and Forlin (2012).

The relatively lower efficacy for inclusive instruction also helps explain the concern about adapting teaching observed in the companion study of attitudes: teachers are hesitant to adapt not because they reject the need but because they doubt their capability to do so well.

8.2 Relationship Between Self-Efficacy and Attitude

The first hypothesis concerned the relationship between self-efficacy and attitude. The correlation between the two is reported in Table 2.

Table 2. Correlation Between Self-Efficacy and Attitude Towards Inclusion

Variables	r	Significance
Self-efficacy and attitude towards inclusion	0.57	$p < .01$

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Self-efficacy was significantly and positively correlated with attitude towards inclusion; the first null hypothesis was rejected. Teachers who felt more capable of teaching children with disabilities also held more favourable attitudes towards inclusion, and vice versa. This positive association, while leaving the direction of influence open, supports the view that confidence and disposition reinforce one another, and that building efficacy is a promising route to improving attitudes—and that improving attitudes may in turn encourage the engagement through which efficacy grows.

8.3 Variation in Self-Efficacy by Experience and Training

The second and third hypotheses concerned the variation of self-efficacy by teaching experience and training. The relevant comparisons are presented in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3. Self-Efficacy by Teaching Experience

Experience	N	Mean	SD	F-value
Up to 5 years	62	3.44	0.66	6.91**
6–15 years	84	3.63	0.62	
Above 15 years	54	3.83	0.59	

Table 4. Self-Efficacy by Training in Inclusive Education

Group	N	Mean	SD	t-value
Trained	84	3.85	0.58	5.04**
Untrained	116	3.45	0.63	

Self-efficacy increased significantly with teaching experience, with the most experienced teachers reporting the highest efficacy; the second null hypothesis was rejected. This pattern reflects the central role of mastery experience among Bandura's (1997) sources of efficacy: years of teaching, including experience with children with disabilities, accumulate the successful experiences from which confidence is built.

Trained teachers also reported significantly higher self-efficacy than untrained teachers, and the third null hypothesis was rejected. Training contributes through several of Bandura's sources at once—providing vicarious models, social persuasion, and supported mastery experiences—and the result mirrors the finding in the companion study that training raises attitudes. Together, experience and training emerge as the principal builders of teachers' confidence for inclusion.

8.4 Self-Efficacy and the Path to Inclusive Practice

Considered together, the results trace a clear developmental path. Teachers begin with attitudes and a baseline of confidence; training and accumulated experience then raise their self-efficacy, particularly the mastery experiences that years in the classroom provide; and rising efficacy, positively linked with attitude, supports more willing and persistent inclusive practice. The dimension that lags throughout—efficacy for inclusive instruction—marks the point at which this development most often stalls and where intervention is therefore most needed.

This picture carries a constructive message for teacher preparation. Because the weakest link is a specific, teachable capability rather than a general reluctance, it is amenable to focused development.

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Equipping teachers with concrete instructional strategies and the supported practice through which to master them addresses the precise gap the data reveal, and because efficacy and attitude move together, gains in capability are likely to be accompanied by gains in disposition. The study thus locates not only the level of teachers' confidence but the specific lever—instructional capability—through which it can most efficiently be raised.

9. Major Findings

- Teachers report moderate self-efficacy for inclusive practice, highest in managing behaviour and lowest in inclusive instruction.
- Self-efficacy is significantly and positively correlated with attitudes towards inclusion.
- Self-efficacy increases significantly with teaching experience.
- Trained teachers report significantly higher self-efficacy than untrained teachers.

10. Educational Implications

Because self-efficacy is built from mastery and supported experience, teacher preparation for inclusion should provide structured, guided practice with children with disabilities rather than theory alone, allowing teachers to accumulate the successful experiences that build confidence. Given that efficacy is lowest for inclusive instruction, professional development should concentrate on practical, demonstrable strategies for differentiation and individualised support.

The positive link between efficacy and attitude means that interventions which raise confidence are likely also to improve dispositions, making efficacy-building a doubly valuable investment. Mentoring by experienced teachers, opportunities to observe successful inclusive practice, and a supportive emotional climate that reduces anxiety would draw on all of Bandura's sources of efficacy and help less experienced and untrained teachers develop the confidence that effective inclusion requires.

11. Conclusion

This paper assessed teachers' self-efficacy for teaching children with disabilities in inclusive settings, related it to their attitudes, and examined its variation by experience and training. The evidence shows that teachers feel moderately efficacious overall but least confident in adapting instruction, that efficacy and attitude are positively linked, and that both experience and training significantly raise efficacy. Taken with the companion study of attitudes, the findings suggest that inclusive education succeeds when teachers not only believe in it but feel able to do it. Building that capability—through training, mentoring, and supported experience—is therefore the key to turning the promise of inclusion into confident, effective classroom practice.

12. Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

The study relied on cross-sectional self-report from 200 teachers, which limits causal inference and may be affected by self-assessment bias. Future research could employ longitudinal designs to trace how efficacy develops with experience and training, use classroom observation to relate reported efficacy to actual practice and student outcomes, and test specific professional-development programmes for their effect on efficacy. Examining efficacy for specific categories of disability would further sharpen the guidance for teacher preparation.

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