

PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES ON INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AND THE ROLE OF TEACHER TRAINING

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Abstract

Including children with special needs represents a cornerstone of contemporary educational policy, but its implementation often poses complex practical, emotional, and pedagogical challenges. While existing research has focused primarily on the perspectives of in-service teachers, this study examines pre-service teachers' perspectives on inclusive education during their professional training. Using a mixed-methods approach, this study analyzed the attitudes of 27 pre-service teachers toward the inclusion of children with special needs in regular classrooms, with a particular focus on how teacher training programs shape their evolving perspectives. Data were collected using two complementary tools: (1) a semi-structured questionnaire administered via Google Forms, incorporating closed and open-ended items, and (2) semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted with 15 participants who provided informed consent. The analysis revealed three main themes: positive attitudes among most teacher students toward inclusion, the critical importance of practical experience, and the significant contribution of theoretical coursework to shaping attitudes. Based on these results, we recommend that teacher education programs expand theoretical training and incorporate diverse and meaningful field experiences in inclusive educational settings from the earliest stages of professional development. Early exposure to inclusive practice may better prepare future teachers to navigate the complexities of serving children with special needs in mainstream settings.

Keywords: *inclusive education, practicum, special needs, pre-service teacher, teacher education*

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Theoretical Framework

As articulated in the Salamanca Declaration (1994), UNESCO's concept of inclusive education emphasizes the fundamental right of every child, regardless of disability, socio-economic status, gender, ethnicity, or other personal differences, to receive an appropriate and quality education within a regular school setting. UNESCO conceptualizes "schools for all" as the most effective means of fostering acceptance, belonging, and equality by systematically adapting education systems. The Declaration calls for comprehensive systemic change, including enhanced teacher training, innovative pedagogical adaptations, and strengthened collaboration between educators, families, and communities, representing a global milestone in promoting social justice and equal educational opportunities (UNESCO, 1994).

Contemporary inclusive education theory builds upon these foundational principles through its commitment to equity, social justice, and universal participation in educational processes (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). Rather than conceptualizing inclusion as a discrete set of interventions targeting specific groups, inclusive education advocates for a comprehensive systemic transformation of schools' pedagogical frameworks, cultural practices, and organizational structures.

This transformation requires schools to fundamentally reconceptualize their approach to diversity, moving beyond accommodation toward creating learning environments that are inherently flexible and responsive (Booth & Ainscow, 2011). Such systemic change demands policy reform and a cultural shift in how educational communities understand difference, challenge barriers to participation, and cultivate inclusive practices that benefit all students.

Successfully implementing these inclusive education principles fundamentally depends on the capacity and commitment of teachers and educational leadership. Effective inclusive practice requires comprehensive teacher preparation encompassing multiple dimensions. These include developing

positive attitudes toward diversity, acquiring advanced pedagogical skills for differentiated instruction, cultivating a deep understanding of diverse learning needs, and building strong self-efficacy in managing heterogeneous classrooms (Nel et al., 2016). Beyond individual teacher competencies, school leadership is critical in creating and sustaining inclusive educational environments.

Educational leaders play a pivotal role in establishing supportive school structures, allocating appropriate resources, fostering collaborative cultures, and providing ongoing professional development that enables teachers to translate inclusive principles into effective classroom practice (Gous et al., 2014). This dual focus on teacher preparation and leadership support creates the foundational infrastructure for moving from theoretical commitment to practical implementation of inclusive education.

Despite achieving widespread international recognition and integration into global policy frameworks, the principles of inclusive education encounter significant challenges in their implementation within national education systems. Translating these universal principles into practice is highly context-dependent and frequently inconsistent across national contexts (Ainscow, 2020; Florian, 2014). Nations confront diverse structural, cultural, and political barriers that fundamentally shape educational reform initiatives' scope and trajectory.

The Israeli education system is a compelling case study of these inherent tensions. Historically, Israel has maintained segregated special education models while demonstrating an increasingly pronounced rhetorical commitment to inclusive practices. This apparent contradiction between policy discourse and institutional practice reflects broader challenges in reconciling ideological commitments with established educational structures.

Recent legislative developments in Israel present a critical juncture for examining these dynamics. The introduction of Amendment No. 11 to the Special Education Law represents a significant policy intervention to advance the inclusive education principles within the Israeli context. This legislative reform offers a valuable analytical opportunity to investigate the complex processes through which global inclusion principles are reinterpreted, adapted, and negotiated within specific national, institutional, and socio-political frameworks (Blass, 2022).

1.2 Amendment 11 to Israel's Special Education Law: Implementation and Impact

While the previous discussion established the theoretical foundations of inclusive education as a systemic transformation benefiting all learners, the Israeli context presents a unique case study in the gradual evolution from segregated special education toward more inclusive practices. Israel's approach reflects both the global movement toward inclusion and the practical challenges of implementing such transformation within existing educational structures, demonstrating how national education systems navigate the tension between specialized support services and inclusive educational environments (Bar, 2025).

Before Amendment 11, Israel's special education system operated primarily through segregated placements, with limited options for students with disabilities to access mainstream educational environments. The traditional framework emphasized categorical placement decisions made by committees with minimal parental input, reflecting an approach prioritizing specialized services over inclusive participation (Weissblay, 2015).

The Special Education Law (Amendment No. 11), enacted in 2018, introduced comprehensive reforms designed to promote inclusion and improve educational access for students with disabilities. The reform fundamentally restructured the philosophical approach and operational mechanisms of special education delivery. Key transformations included establishing new Eligibility and Characterization Committees to replace the previous placement-focused system, introducing parental choice among three educational options, and mandating that services be provided in students' natural environments whenever possible (State of Israel, 2018).

The amendment also reflected a deliberate shift toward more inclusive language and conceptual frameworks. Terminological changes replaced "disability" with "impairment," transformed "placement committees" into "eligibility and characterization committees," and reframed "special education" as

"special education services." These linguistic modifications signaled an intended move from deficit-based categorization toward needs-based service provision, aligning more closely with inclusive education principles emphasizing individual support rather than segregated placement (Israeli Ministry of Education, 2018).

The reform's implementation has yielded complex and sometimes contradictory outcomes. On the individual level, evidence suggests positive impacts on family experiences and satisfaction. Isman and Laufer's (2024) comparative study found that parents in the post-amendment period perceived educational settings as significantly more suitable for their children and more effectively contributing to academic, emotional, and social development than pre-amendment participants. These parents also reported substantially lower distress levels, indicating that the reform strengthened family-school relationships and improved parental mental health and satisfaction.

However, system-level analysis reveals significant gaps between reform intentions and broader outcomes. Blass's (2022) comprehensive evaluation, conducted four years post-implementation, identified substantial shortcomings in achieving the amendment's primary systemic objectives. The reform failed to slow the growth rate in special education student numbers and associated budget allocations, which continued to increase as a proportion of the total Ministry of Education budget. Additionally, the amendment did not significantly increase the proportion of children with special needs studying in integrated frameworks within regular education, nor did it reduce budgetary inequalities between integrated and separate educational frameworks.

1.3 Pre-service Teachers and Inclusive Education: Attitudes and Training

The formation of pre-service teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education constitutes a fundamental determinant of successful inclusion implementation within educational settings. During this critical professional development period, prospective educators undergo a transformative process. Their conceptual frameworks regarding diversity, disability, and pedagogical responsibility are constructed through formal preparation experiences and personal encounters with difference. This attitudinal development process bears profound implications for subsequent instructional decision-making and the degree to which future practitioners will demonstrate commitment to inclusive pedagogical approaches (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Sharma et al., 2008).

Empirical evidence reveals considerable heterogeneity in pre-service teachers' orientations toward inclusive education. While substantial numbers of pre-service teachers articulate theoretical support for inclusion principles, their perspectives demonstrate significant variation along a complex attitudinal spectrum. This continuum encompasses positions ranging from unconditional advocacy through qualified endorsement to, in certain instances, explicit resistance or skepticism. The differential nature of these positions reflects the multifaceted character of inclusion as both an educational philosophy and a practical implementation challenge.

The development of constructive attitudes toward inclusion demonstrates clear associations with specific characteristics of teacher preparation programs. Research consistently indicates that positive attitudinal formations are most likely to emerge when pre-service education incorporates comprehensive exposure to inclusive pedagogical frameworks, provides authentic field-based experiences within heterogeneous educational environments, and facilitates structured opportunities for critical reflection on practice (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Forlin & Chambers, 2011). Conversely, inadequate preparation, insufficient practical competencies, and perceived systemic barriers frequently contribute to developing more cautious or conflicted perspectives (Massé et al., 2022).

Cross-national comparative research illuminates the multidimensional nature of pre-service teachers' inclusive orientations. Canadian investigations have identified differential patterns of attitudinal support across behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions, with students demonstrating the strongest endorsement for behavioral aspects of inclusion while expressing diminished confidence in emotional and mental domains, particularly as their training progressed (Massé et al., 2022). Israeli research has documented significantly more favorable attitudes toward inclusion among education majors than their non-education counterparts, particularly pronounced differences evident in social-value dimensions of inclusive practice (Shauli et al., 2023).

German studies have further established robust associations between self-efficacy beliefs and inclusive attitudes, underscoring the critical importance of cultivating confidence and competence throughout preparation (Selisko et al., 2024).

These empirical findings collectively suggest that cultivating inclusive mindsets among prospective educators transcends mere ideological persuasion, requiring comprehensive, experientially-grounded preparation within supportive institutional contexts. As Israel advances policy reforms designed to strengthen inclusive education—most notably through Amendment No. 11 to the Special Education Law—understanding pre-service teachers' perceptions of their preparation and the relationship between these perceptions and their readiness for inclusive practice becomes increasingly vital.

Investigation of these attitudinal dimensions evaluates the effectiveness of existing teacher education programs. It informs systematic improvements designed to enhance alignment between preparation experiences and the evolving requirements of inclusive educational practice.

While the literature highlights the importance of pre-service teachers' attitudes for implementing inclusive education, findings are mixed and context-dependent. Some studies report generally upbeat attitudes, whereas others identify ambivalence, particularly about emotional and cognitive dimensions, or declining positivity over time. Moreover, few studies have explored how these attitudes are shaped by national policy shifts or systemic reforms, such as Israel's Amendment No. 11 to the Special Education Law. Given this complexity, it is essential to investigate how pre-service teachers perceive inclusive education, what shapes these perceptions, and how prepared they feel to implement inclusion in practice. This study seeks to address this gap.

Main Research Question: What attitudes do Israeli pre-service teachers have toward inclusive education, and how are these shaped by their professional preparation, field experiences, and perceptions of systemic challenges?

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 Research method

This study adopted a mixed-methods approach, integrating qualitative and quantitative methodologies within the theoretical framework of inclusive education. Each approach offered distinct advantages: the qualitative component allowed for an in-depth exploration of participants' personal experiences and perspectives, while the quantitative component enabled the identification of patterns and general trends within a broader population. Integrating both methods facilitated a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the research questions and contributed to the triangulation of data sources, thereby enhancing the study's validity. The decision to combine qualitative and quantitative approaches is grounded in the view that such integration enables researchers to capitalize on the strengths of each methodology while compensating for their respective limitations.

Combining qualitative and quantitative approaches in mixed methods research allows for a more comprehensive understanding of complex educational phenomena by combining the strengths of both methodologies (Creswell & Clark, 2017).

2.2 Participants

The study involved 27 pre-service teachers in a teacher certification program at a College of Education. All participants held prior academic degrees in a variety of disciplines. A comprehensive purposive sampling strategy encompassed all students enrolled in the educational course "Teaching in Heterogeneous Classrooms". Among the participants, 74.1% were full-time students, while 25.9% were concurrently employed as teachers in the education system. This diversity enabled data collection that captured the perspectives of students still engaged in training and those already gaining practical experience in educational settings. Including the entire cohort ensured a broad representation of viewpoints, enhancing the depth and richness of the findings. Palinkas et al. (2015, p. 534) note that such sampling is "used to select respondents that are most likely to yield appropriate and useful information."

2.3 Research tools

This mixed-methods study employed two complementary research tools. The first was a semi-structured questionnaire, distributed via Google Forms, which included primarily closed-ended questions and a few open-ended items. This instrument facilitated the collection of quantitative data regarding participants' general attitudes toward inclusion.

The second tool consisted of in-depth interviews with 20 participants who volunteered to participate in the qualitative phase of the study. This group included five in-service teachers and 15 pre-service teachers. The interviews yielded richer and more nuanced insights into the participants' experiences with inclusive teaching practices.

2.4 Procedures

After the course ended, all 27 students completed an anonymous online questionnaire about their attitudes toward inclusive education (100% response rate). Following this, 15 students volunteered for individual phone interviews (5 pre-service teachers and 10 full-time students). The interviews were conducted over one month at convenient times and lasted 45-60 minutes. All interviews were recorded with permission and transcribed word-for-word. Each interview began with an open question about including children with special needs in regular classrooms, followed by additional questions to explore their views in more depth.

2.5 Data analysis

The analysis of the interview data was conducted according to grounded theory principles as outlined by Charmaz (2006), to identify key ideas, themes, and categories. The coding process followed the three-phase model developed by Strauss and Corbin (1990). In the first phase, the researcher and a research assistant independently read the interview transcripts multiple times to become familiar with the content and to note emerging themes. In the second phase, axial coding was applied to connect related concepts and refine the core categories identified in the data. In the third phase, selective coding was used to integrate the categories into a coherent conceptual narrative that reflects the phenomenon under study, in accordance with Shkedi's (2011) approach to qualitative interpretation. To deepen the analysis, the researchers also adopted strategies proposed by Tzabar Ben-Yehoshua (2016), involving an additional round of thematic reading in which central themes were organized, conceptual links were established, and a sequential structure was developed between categories. Throughout the entire process, the two researchers worked independently at each stage and later met to compare their analyses and resolve discrepancies, thereby enhancing the trustworthiness of the findings.

2.6 Reliability and Ethics

The research proposal was submitted to the college's ethics committee and received formal approval before the study's commencement. Data collection was conducted only after the academic course had ended and final grades had been submitted to minimize potential bias and protect the integrity of participants' responses. This clear separation between course evaluation and research ensured that students could respond freely, without concerns about academic consequences or social desirability pressures.

Participation in the study was entirely voluntary. Students were informed that their involvement served research purposes only and that they could withdraw at any stage without penalty. All participants provided informed consent. Those who participated in the qualitative phase explicitly consented to audio recording their interviews. Anonymity and confidentiality were strictly maintained throughout the research process.

Using a mixed-methods design contributed to the trustworthiness and credibility of the findings. Triangulation between the quantitative questionnaire data and the qualitative interview data enhanced the validity of the results. The qualitative component was further reinforced by detailed documentation of the research procedures, including transcription, coding, and thematic analysis of the interviews.

In accordance with ethical guidelines for research involving human participants and the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki, data were stored securely in password-protected files accessible only to the

researchers. All identifying information was removed during transcription to ensure participants' privacy. No personal data were used or published in a manner that could compromise participants' anonymity.

2.7 The uniqueness of the study

This study's uniqueness stems from its research population and its methodological approach. The participants were pre-service teachers enrolled in an academic retraining program, all of whom already held academic degrees in fields outside of education. This distinctive background provides them with prior academic knowledge and diverse life and professional experiences beyond the educational sphere, offering a unique lens through which to examine inclusive teaching. Methodologically, the study employed a mixed-methods design that integrated quantitative data with qualitative insights. This combination allowed for a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of participants' attitudes, perceptions, and experiences regarding inclusive education.

3. RESULTS

The research findings illuminate the complex nature of pre-service teachers' attitudes toward inclusive practices in Israeli schools. While nearly all participants (91.7%) demonstrated some support for inclusion, the data revealed important distinctions along an attitudinal spectrum. Unconditional advocates (16.7%) embraced inclusion as essential to educational equity and universal belonging. The majority demonstrated conditional acceptance (75%), emphasizing individualized assessment of students' cognitive, behavioral, and social competencies before mainstream placement. A small minority (8.3%) disagreed about universal inclusion policies, arguing that such arrangements may not align with diverse student needs.

3.1 Unconditional Commitment: Full Support for Inclusion

Data analysis identified a distinct subgroup (16.7%) characterized by comprehensive endorsement of inclusive practices. Thematic analysis of their responses identified several key themes: commitment to educational equity, emphasis on social justice principles, and advocacy for universal classroom belonging. These participants consistently articulated views of inclusion as mutually beneficial, describing diverse learning environments as opportunities for enhanced social and academic development across all student populations.

D. discusses the social values of justice and equal opportunity. She emphasizes that every child deserves the same opportunities for growth and development as their peers. All students should embrace these values and treat each other with respect and tolerance to learn how to behave in society in the future.

It is essential to integrate children with special needs into the regular classroom. This allows all children to learn to accept and understand one another and develop patience. They need to understand that with appropriate support, every child can experience success in an equitable learning environment. According to them, the classroom is a microcosm of society. Therefore, the earlier children in the education system learn to interact with children with special needs, the better they will know how to function later in society.

M. explored the pedagogical aspects of inclusive education and suggested that such frameworks provide significant academic advantages for all students. She noted that students who struggle academically may experience increased motivation, which can improve their performance. At the same time, their higher-achieving peers can reinforce their understanding by providing support through peer tutoring.

In my opinion, integrating students with special educational needs enhances academic achievement for the entire classroom. These students can improve their performance by observing and modeling the behaviors of their typically developing peers, which often motivates them to put in extra effort to achieve similar academic results. Additionally, high-achieving

students benefit from this inclusive environment as well. By supporting their peers with special needs, they reinforce and apply their knowledge in practical ways.

Similarly, S. addressed the social advantages of integration and inclusion for students with special educational needs. She highlighted these benefits through her experiential knowledge derived from a family member with special needs who was mainstreamed within a conventional educational framework. This proximity to inclusive educational practices informed her perspective on the social capital acquired through such pedagogical arrangements.

I hold a positive view of inclusive education, shaped by my family's experience with my sister, who has special educational needs. My parents considered whether she should learn in a regular classroom or a dedicated educational setting with small groups. Ultimately, they chose inclusive regular education, which I find very gratifying. This environment allowed her to benefit from meaningful social support from her peers, and she made significant academic progress in this integrated setting.

3.2 Conditional Support for Inclusion

Several students voiced concerns about including students with special educational needs in a regular educational framework. Their views do not completely oppose inclusion; instead, they highlight the importance of assessing each student individually. This means considering factors such as functional capacity, the nature of the disability, available support mechanisms, and the education system's ability to provide personalized interventions.

L. acknowledged the benefits of including pupils with special needs in mainstream classes and supports inclusion. However, she has some reservations about including all children with special needs. She believes that the individual abilities of each student and the feasibility of supporting their growth in a large class setting should be considered. Based on her experience as a student gaining practical experience in schools, she has observed that children with significant learning gaps often do not receive the appropriate support they need.

Inclusion of pupils with special needs has many advantages, and I generally support their integration into the regular education system. However, based on my observations in school, I often see children with significant learning gaps sitting in the classroom, yet they are academically far behind their peers. The teacher cannot dedicate the necessary time to help these pupils progress. As a result, while these pupils may be integrated socially and technically, they do not advance academically. Therefore, decisions regarding integration and inclusion should be based on personalized assessments.

P. advocates for inclusion and believes pupils with special needs should be allowed to learn alongside their peers in the regular education system. Based on her observations as a student, she feels that education systems must fully commit to inclusion by providing the necessary resources, such as personal assistants, throughout the entire school day, not just for part of it. Additionally, she believes that parents must actively participate in this process to ensure that the responsibility does not fall solely on teachers.

I strongly support inclusion and believe it can significantly benefit pupils with special needs. However, as a student, I have sometimes felt frustration and helplessness due to the gap between the willingness to include these pupils and the practical ability of educational teams to implement inclusion effectively. Educational systems must fully commit to inclusion and provide the necessary resources, such as personal assistants, throughout the school day, not just during certain hours. Additionally, it is crucial to ensure that parents are actively involved in the inclusion process, so that it is not solely the teacher's responsibility.

R. also supports the principle of inclusion; however, she argues that effective implementation of inclusive practices is based on required professional skills. As a pre-service teacher, she aims to acquire comprehensive theoretical frameworks and practical pedagogical expertise during her academic training before working as a practicing teacher in the school.

Including pupils with special needs in mainstream classrooms represents a fundamental and equitable educational principle. I advocate for inclusive educational practices and maintain that such approaches facilitate equality of opportunity for all learners. Successful inclusion is contingent upon educators receiving specialized professional development comparable to that provided in special education training programs. As a student observer in classroom settings, I have noted that despite educators' evident commitment, they frequently demonstrate insufficient familiarity with appropriate pedagogical strategies for effectively supporting learners with special needs.

3.3 Reflective Reservations on the Challenges of Inclusive Education

In contrast to the positive attitudes generally expressed by most students, the quantitative data revealed that a minority of respondents (14.8%) expressed concerns and reservations about inclusion. The students raised concerns regarding the education system's capacity to meet the needs of pupils with special needs effectively. They pointed out that the additional workload on teachers can hinder the achievements of the rest of the class and raised doubts about whether integration truly serves the best interests of pupils with special needs. Furthermore, they expressed worries about the lack of support from the school principal and insufficient cooperation from parents.

B. expressed concerns regarding the implementation of the principle of inclusion in regular classrooms. She noted the discrepancies between educational intentions and the reality on the ground. According to her, integrating students with special educational needs is a complicated process that can adversely affect these students. She emphasized the risk of undermining their sense of belonging and success, as well as their frustration. These negative experiences could cause more harm than good.

Integrating pupils with special needs into regular classrooms is a complex issue requiring much thought. If inclusion is not implemented perfectly, it can lead to bad results for pupils with special needs. For the pupils with special needs, inclusion may suffer because they do not receive the necessary response to their individual needs. This can lead to frustration, a lack of belonging, or disappointing learning experiences.

N. referred to the heavy workload experienced by teachers in the classroom. According to her, there are many pupils in each class, and from what she sees in her observations, the teachers cannot support everyone. The heavy workload causes teacher burnout and may lead to their dropping out of the education system. Each additional pupil with special needs requires the preparation of more tailored tasks and special attention during the lesson.

As a pre-service teacher, I do not support including pupils with special needs in the regular classroom. As part of the practical experience, I see children with severe discipline problems that sometimes stem from frustration and sometimes from emotional issues and require the teacher's attention. The teacher cannot teach the planned academic subject and has difficulty managing the classroom optimally. The teacher is worn out and frustrated by the many tasks involved in caring for pupils with special needs, especially by her lack of success in promoting each of them according to their needs.

C. identified several challenges that hinder the implementation of inclusion in mainstream educational settings. She pointed out the potential negative impact on the academic achievements of other students in the classroom, who may not receive enough attention from the teacher. Furthermore, she emphasized that school principals often do not provide the necessary support, expecting teachers to manage these challenges independently. Additionally, she highlighted the lack of cooperation from the parents of children with special needs, who tend to focus on their child's requirements, rather than considering the collective needs of all pupils in the classroom.

I've noticed how challenging it can be for educators to handle inclusion effectively. When a teacher focuses on pupils with special needs, it often comes at the expense of other pupils. While the teacher encourages them to work independently, they still expect feedback on their progress. Additionally, there are other significant challenges, such as a lack of support from school principals and the expectation from parents that teachers should manage all obstacles. Teachers

must simultaneously cater to diverse learning needs while also fulfilling the academic performance expectations of the Ministry of Education.

This study is subject to several methodological limitations that may affect the generalizability and external validity of the findings:

The sample size was relatively modest ($n=27$), which limits the statistical power of the analyses and the ability to generalize findings to the broader population of pre-service teachers.

Second, the study was conducted in a single institutional context, limiting the findings' external validity. The results may reflect institution-specific factors, such as particular pedagogical policies, organizational culture, curriculum design, or learning environment characteristics unique to that setting.

As a result, the transferability of these findings to other teacher education institutions with different structural, cultural, or programmatic characteristics remains uncertain.

These limitations suggest that future studies would benefit from large, multi-institutional samples to improve the generalizability of findings and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomena under study in diverse educational contexts.

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The research findings illuminate the complex nature of pre-service teachers' attitudes toward inclusive practices in Israeli schools. While nearly all participants (91.7%) demonstrated some level of support for inclusion, the data revealed important distinctions between unconditional advocacy (16.7%), conditional acceptance (75%), and outright opposition (8.3%).

The students in the first group (16.7%) fully supported inclusive education. They fully embraced the values of inclusion, primarily equality of opportunity, social justice, and a sense of belonging for every learner. Their positions echo the principle that a regular classroom should be able to accommodate human diversity at its core, with didactical adaptation and not with the expectation of adaptation on the part of the student (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). They perceive inclusion not only as a need for students with disabilities, but as an educational-social opportunity for the entire class.

A Canadian study involving pre-service teachers from five faculties of education found that elementary-level and female students were more likely to adopt an inclusive growth mindset. These students reported greater confidence in communicating with and supporting families of students with disabilities compared to their secondary-level and male counterparts (Ismailos et al., 2019). Similarly, an Israeli study comparing three groups, pre-service teachers, and students from non-education disciplines, found that pre-service teachers held the most positive attitudes toward the social and value-based aspects of inclusive education (Shauli et al., 2023).

Alongside broad support for inclusion, a significant portion of students (75%) expressed conditional support. These students endorsed the principles of inclusion but emphasized the practical difficulties involved in its implementation. Their concerns centered on the gap between ideology and reality, including systemic barriers such as teacher overload, insufficient professional support, and inadequate environmental adaptations. Their perspectives align with the conceptualization of inclusion as an ongoing "path" rather than a fixed solution—one that demands continual adjustment of the learning environment to meet diverse needs (Booth & Ainscow, 2011). These reservations do not signify opposition to inclusion but rather call for a reflective and context-sensitive approach supported by robust systemic infrastructures.

These nuanced attitudes align with findings from a large-scale study conducted in Quebec, Canada, which examined pre-service teachers' attitudes toward students with behavioral difficulties (Massé et al., 2022). While participants generally expressed positive attitudes, they showed the highest positivity on the behavioral component of their attitudes, compared to emotional and cognitive dimensions. Importantly, students in later stages of their training exhibited more reserved attitudes across all

components, suggesting a growing awareness of the complexities of inclusive practice over time. The study also found that self-efficacy beliefs mediated the relationship between teacher characteristics and inclusive attitudes, underscoring the importance of confidence-building during teacher preparation.

A smaller group (8.3%) of students expressed critical or oppositional views toward inclusion. These students raised concerns about potential adverse effects on both children with special needs and their peers in mainstream classrooms. Their criticisms focused on teacher burnout, the limited academic success of integrated students, and insufficient support from school leadership and parents. Although these views appear to contradict the theoretical ideals of inclusion, they may instead underscore the practical limits of inclusion in the absence of essential conditions. Such perspectives highlight the importance of the principle of “support for every learner” and raise the need to distinguish between rhetorical commitments to inclusion and its meaningful, effective realization in practice.

This finding is echoed by a recent German study, which identified two primary attitudinal profiles among undergraduate pre-service teachers: an “exclusive profile,” associated with transmissive beliefs about learning and a preference for exclusion; and a “general inclusive profile,” associated with constructivist learning beliefs and alignment with social and relational models of disability. Importantly, self-efficacy was significantly higher among those in the inclusive profile, while no significant associations were found with gender or stage of training (Selisko et al., 2024).

Taken together, these findings illustrate that attitudes toward inclusion exist along a continuum, rather than as a simple binary of “for” or “against.” Even critical or reserved positions can be interpreted as part of an inclusive framework when they aim to refine and improve implementation in response to contextual challenges. Ultimately, the successful realization of inclusive education depends not only on the endorsement of its values but also on the availability of resources, professional training, and a continuous, critical engagement with practice, as suggested by the students' own perspectives.

5. APPLIED RECOMMENDATIONS

Enhance early practical exposure by offering diverse and meaningful field experiences in inclusive settings from the initial stages of teacher preparation, reflecting students' high value on hands-on training.

Integrate structured pedagogical support, including guided reflection and critical discussions on inclusion and diversity, to deepen understanding and foster commitment to inclusive practice.

Continuously evaluate and adapt the curriculum based on pre-service teachers' perceptions, ensuring it remains responsive to their evolving needs and experiences.

6. RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

This study is subject to several methodological limitations that may affect the generalizability and external validity of its findings:

The sample size was relatively small ($n = 27$), limiting the statistical power of the analyses and the ability to generalize results to the broader population of pre-service teachers.

The research was conducted within a single institutional context, which may reflect institution-specific factors—such as pedagogical policies, curriculum design, organizational culture, or environmental conditions—that are not representative of other settings. As such, the findings are limited in their transferability to other teacher education institutions with different structural, cultural, or programmatic characteristics.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Expand and diversify the sample: Future research should include a larger and more heterogeneous group of pre-service teachers across different institutions and programs.

Conduct longitudinal studies: Tracking changes in attitudes toward inclusion throughout academic training and fieldwork would provide valuable insights into developmental trends and influencing factors.

Differentiate types of inclusion: Investigating attitudes toward various categories of special needs (e.g., cognitive, emotional, behavioral, physical) can reveal nuanced perspectives and differences in teacher preparedness.

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