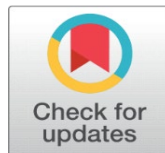


# TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES ON EDUCATIONAL INCLUSION: ANALYZING THE ROLE OF GENDER, EXPERIENCE, AND INTERACTION

Chandrika Soni <sup>1</sup>✉, Dr. Preeti Singh <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Research Scholar, Apex University, Jaipur, India

<sup>2</sup> Associate professor, Research Guide, India



## Corresponding Author

Chandrika Soni,  
[chandrikasoni1432@gmail.com](mailto:chandrikasoni1432@gmail.com)

## DOI

[10.29121/shodhkosh.v4.i2.2023.5946](https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.v4.i2.2023.5946)

**Funding:** This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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## ABSTRACT

This study highlights the critical role of education in promoting the social inclusion of children with disabilities, focusing on global and Indian policy frameworks such as NEP 2020. It examined university teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education intending to bridge the gap in policy implementation due to challenges faced by educators and contribute to creating a more inclusive academic environment. This exploratory-cum-descriptive study adopted a survey-based quantitative research design to explore the attitudes of 115 randomly selected teachers from the 10 purposively selected higher education institutions in Rajasthan. This study adopted the Teacher Inclusion Attitude Scale developed by Ernst and Rogers (2009) to collect data using the 5-point Likert response method and used SPSS software to conduct an analysis of variance and t-test on the data. The study revealed that gender and teaching experience do not significantly influence university teachers' attitudes toward educational inclusion, but prior interaction with people with disabilities significantly shapes their perspectives on educational inclusion. Thus, the study emphasizes policymakers to prioritize teacher training programs that directly engage with people with disabilities to encourage inclusive attitudes in higher education.

**Keywords:** Teachers' Perspectives; Inclusive Education, Educational Inclusion, NEP 2020, Students with Disabilities

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Education is a fundamental right and a crucial driver of social inclusion, particularly for children with disabilities. Global frameworks such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Sustainable Development Goals emphasize the importance of inclusive and equitable education as a means of fostering world peace and prosperity (Saini et al., 2023). In India, laws like the Persons with Disabilities (PWD) Act, 1995, and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, 2016 have laid the groundwork for inclusive education. These laws ensure that children with special needs receive a quality education adapted to their specific needs, underscoring the right to free and compulsory education until age eighteen.

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 represents a landmark effort by the Indian government to create an inclusive educational system. It seeks to integrate children with disabilities into the mainstream schooling process from

**How to cite this article (APA):** Soni, C., and Singh, P. (2023). Teachers' Perspectives on Educational Inclusion: Analyzing the Role of Gender, Experience, and Interaction. *ShodhKosh: Journal of Visual and Performing Arts*, 4(2), 4932-4938. doi: [10.29121/shodhkosh.v4.i2.2023.5946](https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.v4.i2.2023.5946)

foundational to higher education levels, thereby aligning with the provisions of the RPwD Act (Panda, 2024). By promoting an inclusive learning environment, NEP 2020 recognizes the role of education in empowering children with disabilities and ensuring their full participation in society (Archana, 2023).

Despite these strides, barriers to educational inclusion remain. The 76th round National Sample Survey (2018) highlighted significant disparities: only 19.3% of persons with disabilities aged 15 and above had attained secondary education, and an overwhelming 62.9% had never attended school. This underscores the need for robust policy implementation and teacher training programs to foster a supportive academic environment.

## 1.2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

While policies like the NEP 2020 advocate for inclusive education, their effective implementation faces challenges. Educators often lack the training, awareness, and resources required to create an inclusive classroom environment. Attitudes of teaching staff—shaped by factors such as gender, experience, and exposure to persons with disabilities—play a crucial role in shaping inclusive practices. This discrepancy between policy aspirations and ground realities necessitates a deeper understanding of educators' perspectives on inclusive education.

## 1.3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The primary aim of this study is to explore university teachers' perceptions of including students with disabilities in public and private universities in India. Specifically, it seeks to:

- 1) Examine whether teachers' attitudes toward educational inclusion differ by gender.
- 2) Investigate the impact of teaching experience on perspectives about educational inclusion.
- 3) Assess the influence of the type and frequency of interactions with persons with disabilities on teachers' attitudes toward educational inclusion.

## 1.4. RATIONALE AND SIGNIFICANCE

This study is significant for several reasons. First, it contributes to the limited body of research on the attitudes of university educators toward inclusive education in India, particularly in the context of the NEP 2020. Second, understanding these attitudes can inform targeted interventions, such as teacher training programs and curriculum adaptations, to address gaps in inclusive education. Lastly, fostering a supportive academic environment for students with disabilities can contribute to their socio-economic empowerment, reducing the long-term costs of exclusion for both individuals and society.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

**Research Approach:** The study adopted an exploratory-cum-descriptive research approach and relies on a survey-based quantitative research design to explore teachers' attitudes toward educational inclusion.

**Sampling Frame & Techniques:** The study was conducted in Rajasthan. Initially, 10 higher education institutions including 2 public universities, 5 private universities, 1 special education school, and 2 deemed-to-be-universities were identified using a purposive sampling technique. Subsequently, a simple random sampling technique was used to select the respondents, which consisted of teachers, associate professors, and assistant professors.

**Sample Size:** A total of 138 questionnaires were administered to the teachers/ professors, over a six weeks period (mid-October to November-end), of which 115 duly filled questionnaires were returned (with 83.33% response rate). Thus, the sample size of the study was 115.

**Instrumentation:** The study used the Teacher Inclusion Attitude Scale developed by Ernst & Rogers (2009) to collect the data. The scale consists of two sections. The first section contains questions related to the demographic information of the participants, and the second section (with 27 items to be responded on a 5-point Likert scale) focuses on the teachers' perspectives on educational inclusion.

**Research Hypotheses:** To achieve the objectives of the study, three hypotheses were proposed –

**H01:** There is no significant variation in male and female teachers' attitudes toward educational inclusion.

**H02:** There is no significant variation in teachers' attitudes toward educational inclusion based on their teaching experience.

**H03:** There is no significant difference between teachers' attitudes toward educational inclusion based on their type and frequency of interaction with persons with disabilities.

**Statistical Tools:** Descriptive statistics such as mean, standard deviation, and percentage were used to summarize the data, while inferential statistics such as ANOVA and independent samples t-tests were used to assess teachers' attitudes toward educational inclusion.

**Data Analysis Software:** Data were analyzed using SPSS software (version 23.0) to ensure accurate statistical analysis and interpretation of results.

**Ethical Considerations:** Informed consent was obtained from the participants before the survey, and their confidentiality and anonymity were assured. They were informed that participation was voluntary and the data collected would be used only for academic research purposes.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1. ANALYSIS OF DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS

This study considered three major factors (gender, age, and teaching experience), to analyze the demographic characteristics of the teachers. The demographic information of the participants is summarized in the following table

**Table 1** Results of Demographic Analysis

| Demographic Information |                   | Count | Percentage |
|-------------------------|-------------------|-------|------------|
| Gender                  | Male              | 87    | 75.65%     |
|                         | Female            | 28    | 24.35%     |
| Age Group               | Below 30 years    | 15    | 13.04%     |
|                         | 30-40 years       | 37    | 32.17%     |
|                         | 40-50 years       | 43    | 37.39%     |
|                         | 50 years & above  | 20    | 17.39%     |
| Teaching Experience     | Less than 5 years | 14    | 12.17%     |
|                         | 5-10 years        | 28    | 24.35%     |
|                         | 10-15 years       | 39    | 33.91%     |
|                         | 15 years & above  | 34    | 29.57%     |

**Source** Primary Data

Table 1 lists the demographic information of the respondents. Among the respondents, male teachers accounted for the majority (75.65%), while female teachers accounted for a smaller proportion (24.35%). In terms of age, the largest number of teachers were in the 40-50 age group (37.39%), followed by the 30-40 age group (32.17%), the 50-plus age group (17.39%), and the 30-less age group (13.04%). In terms of teaching experience, the most teachers were those with 10-15 years of teaching experience (33.91%), followed by those with 15 years of teaching experience (29.57%), those with 5-10 years of teaching experience (24.35%), and those with less than 5 years of teaching experience (12.17%). These data indicate that this study mainly reflects the perceptions of male, middle-aged, and senior teachers.

### 3.2. TESTING OF HYPOTHESIS H01

This study proposed the null hypothesis (H01) that there is no significant variation in male and female teachers' attitudes toward educational inclusion. To test this hypothesis, the researcher initially evaluated the Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S) statistic to test the normality of the sampled data and then examined the differences in attitudes between male and female teachers using ANOVA.

**Table 2** Results of Normality test (H01)

| Demographic Factor |        | K-S Normality Statistic (D) | Sig. |
|--------------------|--------|-----------------------------|------|
| Gender             | Male   | 0.1254                      | .822 |
|                    | Female | 0.1119                      | .867 |

Source SPSS Outcome

The normality test results shown in the table above indicate that for the data sample containing gender-based responses, the p-value is greater than the  $\alpha$  value of .05. This indicates that the data is normally distributed.

**Table 3** Results of ANOVA test (H01)

| Sources        | SS      | df  | MS    | F-statistic | Sig. |
|----------------|---------|-----|-------|-------------|------|
| Between Group  | 3.543   | 1   | 3.543 | 2.110       | .149 |
| Within Group   | 189.738 | 113 | 1.679 |             |      |
| Total Variance | 193.281 | 114 |       |             |      |

Source SPSS Outcome

The table shows the results of the analysis of variance in attitudes of male and female teachers toward educational inclusion. The F statistic is 2.110 and the p-value is .149. The p-value (.149) is above the threshold of .05, which means that there is no significant variation in the attitudes of the two groups of university teachers.

This finding is consistent with previous research, such as Charania et al. (2024) and Dey & Srivastava (2022), who reported that there were few gender differences in professional attitudes among teachers in similar contexts. However, non-significant results may also indicate that a larger sample size or additional variables are needed to fully capture potential gender-based differences in attitudes (Contreras, 2023).

### 4. TESTING OF HYPOTHESIS H02

This study proposed the null hypothesis (H02) that there is no significant variation in teachers' attitudes toward educational inclusion based on their teaching experience. To test this hypothesis, the researcher initially evaluated the Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S) statistic to test the normality of the sampled data and then examined the significance of the variation in attitudes between teachers, based on their experience, using ANOVA.

**Table 4** Results of Normality test (H02)

| Demographic Factor  |                   | K-S Normality Statistic (D) | Sig. |
|---------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------|------|
| Teaching Experience | Less than 5 years | 0.1109                      | .940 |
|                     | 5-10 years        | 0.1332                      | .826 |

|  |                  |        |      |
|--|------------------|--------|------|
|  | 10-15 years      | 0.1292 | .864 |
|  | 15 years & above | 0.1031 | .935 |

**Source SPSS Outcome**

The normality test results shown in the table above indicate that for the data sample containing responses of university teachers, based on their experience, the p-value is greater than the  $\alpha$  value of .05. This indicates that the data is normally distributed.

**Table 5** Results of ANOVA test (H02)

| Sources        | SS      | df  | MS    | F-statistic | Sig.  |
|----------------|---------|-----|-------|-------------|-------|
| Between Group  | 11.722  | 3   | 3.907 | 2.604       | .0557 |
| Within Group   | 166.545 | 111 | 1.501 |             |       |
| Total Variance | 178.267 | 114 |       |             |       |

**Source SPSS Outcome**

The table shows the results of the analysis of variance in attitudes of teachers toward educational inclusion, based on their experience. The F statistic is 2.604 and the p-value is .0557. The p-value (.0557) is above the threshold of .05, which means that there is no significant variation in the attitudes of the university teachers, based on their teaching experience.

This finding is consistent with previous research showing that attitudes toward inclusion in education are more influenced by personal beliefs, institutional culture, and inclusive practices than by teaching experience (Dignath et al., 2022; Woodcock et al., 2022). This result suggests that experienced teachers may not necessarily have more positive or negative attitudes toward inclusion than less experienced teachers, perhaps because the nature of professional development and exposure to inclusive pedagogy differs at different career stages (Charitaki et al., 2022; Dignath et al., 2022). These findings challenge the assumption that experience alone will give teachers a broader perspective on inclusive education, highlighting the need for ongoing professional learning to ensure that all teachers are prepared to effectively meet the needs of diverse students.

**5. TESTING OF HYPOTHESIS H03**

This study proposed the null hypothesis (H03) that there is no significant difference between teachers' attitudes toward educational inclusion based on their type and frequency of interaction with persons with disabilities. To test this hypothesis, the researcher first evaluated the Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S) statistic to test the normality of the sampled data and then used independent samples t-test to assess the significance of the differences in attitudes based on teacher interaction.

**Table 6** Results of Normality test (H03)

| Demographic Factor |     | K-S Normality Statistic (D) | Sig. |
|--------------------|-----|-----------------------------|------|
| Interaction        | Yes | 0.1245                      | .844 |
|                    | No  | 0.1068                      | .979 |

**Source SPSS Outcome**

The normality test results shown in the table above indicate that for the data sample containing responses of university teachers, based on their type and frequency of interaction with persons with disabilities, the p-value is greater than the  $\alpha$  value of .05. This indicates that the data is normally distributed.

**Table 7** Results of Independent Samples t-test (H03)

| Interaction | Group Statistics |       |       |         | Levene's Test |      | t-test |     |      |            |          |
|-------------|------------------|-------|-------|---------|---------------|------|--------|-----|------|------------|----------|
|             | N                | Mean  | SD    | SE Mean | F             | Sig. | t      | df  | Sig. | Mean Diff. | SE Diff. |
| Yes         | 63               | 4.253 | 1.238 | 0.156   | 93.67         | .000 | -39.49 | 113 | .000 | -0.903     | 0.029    |
| No          | 52               | 3.466 | 1.519 | 0.211   |               |      |        |     |      |            |          |

**Source** SPSS Outcome

Independent sample t-tests revealed statistically significant differences in attitudes between teachers who had interacted with people with disabilities (mean= 4.253, SD= 1.238) and those who had not (mean= 3.466, SD= 1.519). Levene's test revealed a significant difference in variance between the two groups ( $F= 93.67$ ;  $p= .000$ ), indicating that the assumption of equal variances was not met. Therefore, the t-test results were adjusted accordingly. The t-test revealed that teachers who had interacted had more positive attitudes toward educational inclusion, with a highly significant difference ( $p= .000$ ). The mean difference of -0.903, with  $SE= 0.029$ , indicates a significant effect.

The findings are consistent with previous research that highlights the impact of personal interaction on attitudes toward educational inclusion. Studies by Babik & Gardner (2021) and Manav et al. (2024) stressed that contact and direct experience with people with disabilities can foster empathy and reduce prejudice, leading to more positive attitudes towards inclusive education. Conversely, a lack of interaction may reinforce stereotypes and resistance to inclusion (Kunz et al., 2021).

## 6. CONCLUSION AND AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

### 6.1. CONCLUSION

This study highlights that university faculty attitudes toward educational inclusion are not significantly influenced by gender or teaching experience, but meaningful social interactions with people with disabilities positively shape their views. These findings highlight the importance of creating opportunities for faculty to interact with people with disabilities to foster inclusive thinking. Training programs and workshops that enable meaningful interactions with persons with disabilities should be incorporated into faculty development programs. Given the limited exploration of inclusion in Indian universities, further research is recommended to fully assess faculty attitudes and identify mechanisms to encourage inclusive practices in higher education.

### 6.2. RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study have important implications for policymakers, educators, and researchers aiming to promote inclusion in education in India. This study lays the foundation for exploring the significant factors that influence attitudes, providing valuable insights into the evolving discussion of inclusion in higher education.

## 7. LIMITATIONS AND AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

While this study provides valuable insights, it is limited in that it focused on a specific group of university faculty, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to all professionals. In addition, it did not consider other variables that may influence attitudes, such as cultural background or institutional policies. Future research should investigate these aspects and expand the scope to include different regions and disciplines to fill the gap in the literature on inclusion at the university level in India.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

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