



## Teachers' perspectives toward integrating special education need learners in normal classrooms: A case study of Arab teachers in Israel

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### ABSTRACT

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This paper constitutes a relatively new area that has emerged from the relationship between Special Education Need (SEN) students in normal classrooms and teachers' perspectives. The purpose of this study was to investigate factors that could contribute to differences in attitudes of public-school teachers toward the inclusion of students with special needs in general education classes in the Arab schools in Israel. The study used a quantitative methodology, adopting an online survey method of data collection, addressed to a total number of 237 teachers working in government public schools. The findings indicated that teachers who hold a master's degree were more likely to accept the idea of integrating SEN students in regular settings and suggested that teachers' education level affected their emotional attitude towards SEN integration. These findings embody significant practical meanings. A change is needed in the way Arab society perceives students with SEN, and how this society treats their integration into the framework of regular students. A practical recommendation of this study is that the Ministry of Education should offer intensive training for a wide range of teachers to be able to deal with students with special needs.

**Contribution/Originality:** This study is a pioneering study to investigate factors that could contribute to differences in attitudes of the elementary-school teachers toward the inclusion of students with special needs in general education classes in Arab schools in Israel.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Integration of special needs children in the regular education system deems the incorporation of students with special needs as its main objective and core ideology. Additionally, this program functions through customized rehabilitative and instructive strategies in the pedagogical scopes. In contrast, it is also found that teachers with a higher level of education were less emotionally open to the issue of student integration. This gap was found, both when the participants' subjective emotional support concerning the level of education was examined, and in regression analyses, after monitoring the level of knowledge and value attitudes towards the integration of students with Special Education Need as usual. This finding implies that teachers with higher degrees are more skeptical about success.

The purpose of this study was to investigate factors that could contribute to differences in attitudes of public-school teachers toward the inclusion of students with special needs in general education classes in the Arab schools

in Israel. The originality in this study that it is the first study to investigate these attitudes amongst elementary school teachers in Arab schools in Israel. For inclusion to be successful, teachers (special and general education teachers) have to have a positive attitude toward the inclusion of students with special needs.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Teachers' Attitudes towards Integration

Several studies have been proposed for inclusion, some focusing on teachers, others on attitudes. A recent study completed by [Majadley \(2019\)](#) revealed that teachers' attitudes may affect the learning process and are considered the main concern for special needs students who are enrolled in a regular classroom. A recent analysis of existing literature on the impact of inclusion on academic and social aspects of students found that inclusion had varying effects on children of different grades; in summary [\(Kart & Kart, 2021\)](#) stated that; "... Literature indicates mostly positive or neutral effects of inclusion on the academic achievement of typically developing students in the lower grades, whereas neutral or negative influence is indicated for later grades. .... students without disabilities have socially benefited from being in inclusive classrooms with students with disabilities. Mainly, the social effects of inclusion are reduction of fear, hostility, prejudice, and discrimination as well as an increase of tolerance, acceptance, and understanding.

Research on students' inclusion has a long tradition. The literature shows that there are three main elements to ensure its success: Attitudes, Resources and Curriculum. [Favazza, Phillipson, and Kumar \(2000\)](#), due to the proven liaison between attitudes and conduct, reported a heeded wave of interest in the field of attitudes. According to [Eagly](#), one's nature of responses is contrived by the nature of one's attitudes. This is to say, the relationship between responses and attitudes is strongly related. In other words, this means that one would react positively if he possessed a positive attitude and would have a negative reaction if he had a negative mindset [\(Eagly, 1992\)](#). [Magumise and Sefotho \(2020\)](#) who studied the parent-teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education in Zimbabwe have categorized their results into three categories, which are positive, mixed, and negative attitudes.

Some authors have driven the further development of inclusion attitudes. The study of [Elliot \(2008\)](#) is well documented. Elliot investigated teachers' attitudes toward the inclusion of Special Education Need SEN children in regular classes. Surprisingly, the Special Education Need (SEN) children showed similar results comparing other normal students. Elliot reveals that teachers with a positive mindset towards this matter succeeded in providing the students with more practice attempts. Therefore, they attained high levels of success. These results become strengthened by other studies that found teachers' attitudes are significant for the success of the inclusion of Special Education Need students in physical education [\(Rizzo & Vispoel, 1992\)](#).

[Lupu \(2017\)](#) resorts to the focus-group method in his research on the attitudes of a small group of educators on the integration of Special Education Need students in public schools. The data reveals the adoption of a positive mindset towards inclusion, as those teachers did not regard disabilities as a negative or an obstructive aspect, but rather focused on the students' right to get educated, trained, and included in society regardless of their disabilities. Additionally, the same teachers reported that they believed that students with moderate to severe disabilities are able to be integrated into mainstream schooling. In Canada, for instance, a study carried out by [Sharma and Sokal \(2016\)](#) proved that there is a positive correlation between the teachers' level of conduct, attitude, attention, and concern in the classrooms to the process of inclusion. The findings reveal that educators who harbored positive attitudes toward inclusion scored lower on the attitude measurement scales and in their concern about inclusion. These results have been influential in the field because they affect the learning process. The case of children with special education needs, who are both a minority as Palestinian citizens of Israel [\(Hager & Jabareen, 2016\)](#) and face the challenges of disability, can be understood as a clear example of how a single-axis approach is potentially insufficient.

Researchers defined education as the process of teaching learners regardless of their age, background, and with or without disabilities in schools by a teacher. The teacher should be qualified in the field and use various techniques to develop students' knowledge. The recent work argues that the reality of teaching Arab learners with special needs is receiving more interest from researchers. Therefore, teachers should be well prepared to deal with both learners according to their intellectual ability. Those teachers should receive proper training to ensure teaching students successfully (Majadley, 2021).

## 2.2. Teachers' Profession in the Context of Integration

Teacher training is divided into two main educational levels in Israel, elementary and secondary education. Presently, primary school teachers go to a teaching college ideally between three to four years. After three years of enrolling at the college, they can obtain a teaching bachelor's degree in Education. In their first, second, and third years, teachers keep investing their time and energy in the classrooms. For secondary educators, however, training, undergraduates attend one of the five Israeli universities for education and get both a bachelor's degree and an optional teaching certificate following in the fourth year. Teacher training in colleges and universities can be forged into both types of education including disabilities. Notwithstanding undergrad preparation, numerous instructors strive to earn an advanced degree in special education or regular ones (Gumpel & Awartani, 2003).

The teachers in mainstream education strongly believe that learners with learning disabilities believe that a typical classroom has the potential to develop academic and social skills more quickly than a special classroom. Contrary to their agreement with their general education counterparts, teachers of learners with learning disabilities were overly concerned about the lack of resources to fully integrate those with learning disabilities into regular classrooms, and the inability of general teachers to meet their educational needs due to lack of training and stigmatization by younger learners without disabilities due to lack of awareness.

Additionally, special education teachers agree that general class teachers lack the capacity to adequately teach students with special needs due to their lack of training in teaching students with learning disabilities. As teachers of general education and special education in Saudi Arabia have negative opinions about integrating students with learning disabilities into regular classrooms, noting that it significantly changes teaching and classroom standards as well as general organization and development of academic and social skills (Alnahdi, 2020).

The demographic information of teachers has shown a significant effect on teachers' perspectives regarding inclusion. Seminal contributions have been made by Ahmmed, Sharma, and Deppeler (2012). Their study found that male teachers showed positive attitudes more than female teachers regarding inclusion. The results also showed that teachers who hold a PTC (Primary Teacher Certificate) carry less positive perspectives regarding inclusion in comparison with teachers who hold a master's degree in education.

The concept of inclusion is emerging as a new concept and recently was integrated into the curriculum to develop teachers teaching skills and help them to learn more knowledge as well as raise their awareness about the inclusion of Special Education Need (SEN) students. A large number of existing studies in the broader literature have examined the inclusion concept. Parasuram (2006) in their study found that teachers who completed their post-graduate studies showed positive attitudes towards inclusion in Mumbai.

While talking about teachers' knowledge and its relation to educational inclusion, many pieces of research have been conducted (Ryle, 1971; Shulman, 1986). Teachers-knowledge can be defined as the differentiation between 'knowing that' and 'knowing what.' Eraut (1994) elaborates on teachers' knowledge by dividing it into many main types. These types are propositional information of hypotheses, ideas, and academic standards, pragmatic learning portrayed by schedules, methods, and procedures, and inferred information, which is implied but not manifested, and know the way they should implement these in a certain situation.

According to El Refaei (2016) one of the most pressing and invasive issues affecting the development of countries around the world is the issue of disability. Several studies have shown that teachers have not changed

their approach to generalization based on higher education. Stoler (1992) found that there are no significant differences between teachers with different levels of education regarding perceptions of generalization. Moreover, Kern (2006) did not detect any difference concerning teachers who held a bachelor's or master's degree. Bruce (2010) argued that there are no significant differences between different levels of degrees obtained (bachelor's degree, master's degree) on the overall relationship to integration and inclusion. Finally, Buford and Casey (2012) also found that there are no differences in teachers holding a bachelor's or master's degree. The study assured that teacher's degree level did not change their attitude toward integration.

Discussions about inclusive education and how the school system might arrange education for all children often involved concerns with many dilemmas and tensions, for example, social efficacy and measures of effective schools, full inclusion or part-time inclusion, celebration of diversity or the creation of a separate specialist all children or Children in need of support (Magnússon, 2022).

### 2.3. Question of the Study

1. How does the level of education affect teachers' attitudes regarding integrating special needs students (SEN) in regular schools in Arab society in Israel?

### 2.4. Research Hypotheses

*H1-There are no statistically significant differences at ( $\alpha \leq 0.05$ ) in pre-service teachers' attitudes regarding the inclusion of students with special needs in the regular classroom due to academic qualification.*

*H2- Teachers' academic education level affects their attitude toward Special Education Need integration.*

The success of engaging students with intellectual disabilities in regular classrooms depends largely on the attitude of teachers. In addition, teachers' attitudes may depend on their level of education level i. e. bachelor, master, or others. As shown in this review of the literature, teachers' attitude toward educating students with SEN is a critical key to changing schools to be more adaptable for all students. If regular instructors do not agree to teach students with special needs, they assume that there is another teacher with SEN who would take responsibility for teaching those students. This study examined the overall information and attitudes of elementary school teachers in the Arab sector in Israel regarding the education of SEN students.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

### 3.1. Data Collection

The current study used a quantitative research design, adopting an online survey method of data collection. An online questionnaire was developed by the researcher. Abuhamda, Ismail, and Bsharat (2021) stated, "Quantitative and qualitative methods are the engine behind evidence-based outcomes". For the validity of the questionnaire, it was sent to the researchers' Ph. D. supervisor and two other researchers. The teacher respondents were randomly selected from different places and questionnaires were sent to them by email. The link to the questionnaire was also distributed on social networks (WhatsApp). This approach was chosen because it allowed the researcher to access the answers while providing anonymity to the study participants.

### 3.2. Instrument

The questionnaire was divided into two main sections. The first section aimed at gathering demographic information, including gender, age, degree specialization, special education training, and experience teaching students with disabilities in the classroom. The second section aimed at investigating teachers' attitudes using a 5 point Likert Scale toward the inclusion of special needs students in regular classrooms. addresses the emotional and behavioral attitudes of teachers to integration, as well as their knowledge of integrating students with special needs. These are the three dimensions of the dependent variable "attitude," examined in this study.

### 3.3. Participants

The participants were teachers who taught in elementary schools in Arab society in Israel. A total number of 237 teachers employed in Arab schools in Israel constituted the target population for this study. Some had a bachelor's degree while others had a master's degree.

Participants were asked to answer questionnaires that focused on integrating students with special needs into their classrooms. In the case of those teachers who chose to agree to participate in the study, they were referred to fill out the survey. Guidelines and scale keys were posted at the top of each web page and teachers were instructed to respond to items in the survey in a way that would reflect their best judgment.

### 3.4. Data Analysis

The data analysis was completed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23. In the first stage, descriptive statistics of the study population, characteristics, and the main research variables were examined. In this framework, the distribution of the univariate frequencies for each of the variables was examined, as well as averages and standard deviations. In the second stage, the internal reliability of the various research questionnaires was examined according to the Cronbach  $\alpha$  index. This analysis is accompanied by correlation analysis between the study variables. The study hypothesis was then tested. The research hypothesis argued that there were no differences in the attitudes of pre-service teachers toward SEN integration regarding their level of education. This hypothesis was tested by using a statistical mean comparison test (i.e., t-test and analysis of variance (ANOVA) analysis) to compare the mean of independent subsamples relative to the study hypothesis.

Finally, regression analyzes were performed to understand how teachers' level of education is related to teachers' attitudes toward SEN integration. The first set of analyzes used a "stepwise" approach with threshold 0.05 for inclusion and threshold 0.10 as an exclusion criterion, in which the teachers' access dimensions (separately) were used as dependent variables. Such an analysis approach helps to identify only significant relationships between dependent and independent variables in the model. Additional regression analysis was therefore performed. This analysis system used a "stepwise" approach with threshold 0.05 for inclusion and threshold 0.10 as an exclusion criterion, where the dimensions of teachers' positions (separately) were used as dependent variables, but each model also included the other two dimensions of teachers about Special Education Need integration.

**Table 1.** Participants' demographic characteristics.

Demographic characteristics		N	%
Gender	Female	218	92.0%
	Male	19	8.0%
Age group	18-25	13	5.5%
	26-35	73	30.8%
	36-45	114	48.1%
	46-55	32	13.5%
	55+	5	2.1%
Academic education level	BA/Bed	112	47.3%
	MA/Med	125	52.7%
Teaching grade	1st-2nd Grades	68	28.7%
	3rd-4th Grades	70	29.5%
	5th-6th Grades	99	41.8%
Total		237	100.00%

## 4. RESULTS

After excluding questionnaires with missing data, the sample consisted of 237 pre-service teachers. As summarized in Table 1, 92% of the participants were females, almost half of the sample (48.1%) were aged 36-45 while 36.3% of the sample were younger than 35 years. All participants had an academic degree, and most of them

(52.7%) were graduates. 41.8% of the participants taught fifth- and sixth-grade students, 29.5% taught third-fourth-grade students, and the rest (28.7%) taught first- and second-grade students.

To test for education level differences, a t-test comparison for independent samples was conducted (see Table 2). While no significant differences were documented regarding the behavior and knowledge dimension of teachers' attitude toward SEN integration, Undergraduate teachers' Emotional attitude ( $M=3.87$ ) was found to be significantly higher ( $t_{(df=229)}=2.203$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) than graduate teachers ( $M=3.71$ ).

**Table 2.** Preservice teachers' attitudes toward SEN integration by teachers' education level – t-test comparison.

Preservice teachers' attitudes toward SEN integration	Education level				t	(df)
	BA/B Ed		MA/M Ed			
	M	SD	M	SD		
Behavior	4.15	0.62	4.16	0.53	0.119	(229)
Knowledge	3.67	0.60	3.64	0.57	0.318	(229)
Emotion	3.87	0.52	3.71	0.55	2.203*	(229)

Note: \* $p<0.05$ .

These findings suggest that teachers' education level affects their emotional attitude towards SEN integration. These findings confirm the behavioral-value support of Arab teachers regarding the integration of children with SEN in normal frameworks, but also limitations in the level of teachers' knowledge of the subject, as well as the personal reluctance of teachers to apply the subject in their classroom. The findings also show that there is a close relationship between the behavioral-value attitude of teachers in the Arab sector and their level of knowledge and their emotional-subjective attitude.

## 5. DISCUSSION

These findings embody significant practical meanings. A change is needed in the way Arab society perceives students with Special Education Need, and how this society treats their integration into the framework of regular students. The conservative and traditional nature of Arab society towards these students assimilates among many a negative perception of the disabilities, and with it also reservations about such students or their inclusion in accepted social frameworks. The research hypothesis yielded the result that the level of education affects teachers' attitudes.

The findings of the study in this context examined comparing respondents' attitudes with BA / B.Ed. to respondents with MA / M.Ed. The researcher analyzed the data through regression analysis. Two main insights emerge from the findings. The first insight was that the level of education was not reflected in the attitudes or knowledge of the respondents towards the integration of the students in ordinary frameworks. The results of this paper are in line with previous work that stated teachers' attitudes toward integrating students with Special Education Need in the usual frameworks. This paper found also even before the stage of choosing the profession and studies, in other words, these are attitudes that are influenced by the culture of the teachers and, as stated above, grown up and shaped. This is a conservative culture, with a perception that expresses reservations and even skepticism about the chances of success of integrating students into a normal framework (Sandler-Loeff & Shahak, 2006). Moreover, it is apparent that education also does not contribute to significant gaps among study participants, and hence exposure to the subject during undergraduate studies for teaching includes such a reference, but it is insufficient. The fact that no differences in the level of knowledge were found in this subject between the undergraduate and graduate students indicates that this subject does not receive appropriate or wide enough exposure in post-graduate studies.

Several studies have shown that teachers have not changed their approach to generalization based on higher education. Stoler (1992) found no significant difference between teachers with different levels of education regarding perceptions of generalization. The study of Parasuram (2006) found that the level of education of those

teachers who hold a master's degree showed positive attitudes regarding the inclusion of Special Education Need. The study also indicated that teachers who hold a bachelor's degree showed less positive attitudes. An earlier study completed by Paterson (1995) found that the community's attitudes towards inclusion are much affected by the level of education of the individual. According to Yunker (1988) education is slightly related to positive attitudes toward Special Education Need (SEN) students.

Likewise, Daniel (2017) research also showed the positive effect teacher training programs have on their attitudes towards inclusive education. Nonetheless, a large number of educators expressed their dissatisfaction with the lack of inclusive education training programs and thus, expressed their incompetence towards the inclusion of SEN students in regular classrooms. With these findings in mind, a legislated requirement of teacher training to work with specific disabilities for all teachers and not just special education teachers becomes instrumental to the success of the inclusion process.

There are clear implications for policies that try to bring students into the mainstream if teachers have a negative view of inclusion and think they shouldn't be there, or that it's someone else's responsibility. By contrast, teachers who display a more positive attitude toward inclusion are more likely to adjust their teaching approaches to help students who have additional support needs (Lüke & Grosche, 2018; Subban & Mahlo, 2017). It was also found that teachers with a higher level of education were less emotionally open to the issue of student integration. This gap was found, both when examining participants' personal emotional support regarding education level, as well as in regression analyses, after observing the level of knowledge and value attitudes toward students' integration with Special Education Need as usual.

The conservative and traditional nature of Arab society towards these students assimilates among many a negative perception of the disabilities, and with it also reservations about such students or their inclusion in accepted social frameworks. To change the limiting perception towards students with Special Education Need, a perceptual change that begins in education is required, but this also requires openness among the teachers themselves. The attitude of teachers from the Arab sector towards the integration of students is significantly influenced by the training process, and in particular in the first degree. The impact of the training process is on the level of teachers' knowledge, but more (quantitative) training influences a positive change in teachers' behavioral support in integrating students with Special Education Need, and only in the next stage is this support expressed in both the level of knowledge and the emotional position of the teachers. Therefore, teacher training institutions should expand the range of courses and practical training in the field of special education.

## 6. CONCLUSION

In this sense, it is possible that this finding indicates that all custodians with a higher level of education have more professional experience and are therefore soberer about the gap between the expectations of successful integration and their personal ability to complete such a move.

The findings of the study confirm the behavioral-value support of Arab teachers regarding the integration of children with SEN in normal frameworks, but also limitations in the level of teachers' knowledge of the subject, as well as the personal reluctance of teachers to apply the subject in their classroom. The findings also show that there is a close relationship between the behavioral-value attitude of teachers in the Arab sector and their level of knowledge and their emotional-subjective attitude.

The attitudes of teachers in the Arab sector are influenced by the level of education the teachers so teachers with a higher level of education are more likely to have a lower emotional openness toward the integration of students (SEN) in ordinary settings. This is to say, those teachers are often soberer about the gap between the expectations of successful integration and their personal ability to complete such a move.

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