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Teachers' Attitudes Towards Inclusive Education
in a Cultural Context
Postawy nauczycieli wobec inkluzji edukacyjnej
w kontekście różnic kulturowych

ABSTRACT

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE: This study aimed to capture cross-cultural differences in teachers' attitudes toward educational inclusion across Indonesia, Poland, the Republic of Germany, and the Slovak Republic, and to identify the most significant predictors shaping these attitudes.

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM AND METHODS: The main research question focused on differences in three aspects of pro-inclusion attitudes among teachers (N = 666) from four countries, as well as the correlates and predictors of these attitudes. The research employed a quantitative paradigm using standardized measurement tools: MATIES by Mahat, SES by Rosenberg, EQ by Greenberg and colleagues, and the Fun for Teaching Learning Scale by Okada.

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THE PROCESS OF ARGUMENTATION: Teachers' attitudes towards educational inclusion are important factors in determining the success of inclusive education for students with disabilities. Understanding the factors that shape these attitudes is essential from both theoretical and practical perspectives.

RESEARCH RESULTS: The analysis revealed that teachers' attitudes towards educational inclusion vary across cultures. German teachers exhibited the least favorable attitudes toward inclusion. Teachers in general education schools demonstrated more pro-inclusion attitudes compared to those in special education settings. Gender was not found to be a differentiating factor in attitudes toward inclusion.

CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND APPLICABLE VALUE OF RESEARCH: Including students with disabilities is a very difficult and demanding task in modern schools. Successful implementation requires professional preparation and proper organization of space and time, and a strong commitment to individualizing each student's education. As positive teacher attitudes can enhance the effectiveness of inclusive education, developing such attitudes is vital. Practical interventions should be based on analyzing and strengthening predictors of pro-inclusion attitudes to develop the necessary personal resources.

→ **KEYWORDS:** INCLUSIVE EDUCATION, TEACHERS' ATTITUDES, CULTURAL CONTEXT, SCHOOL SETTINGS, SPECIAL NEEDS

STRESZCZENIE

CEL NAUKOWY: Celem przedstawionych badań było uchwycenie różnic międzykulturowych w zakresie postaw wobec inkluzji edukacyjnej prezentowanych przez nauczycieli z Indonezji, Polski, Niemiec i Słowacji oraz wykazanie najbardziej istotnych predyktorów umożliwiających ich rozwój.

PROBLEM I METODY BADAWCZE: Główne pytanie badawcze koncentrowało się wokół różnic w zakresie trzech aspektów proinkluzyjnych postaw prezentowanych przez nauczycieli pochodzących z czterech porównywanych krajów, a także analizy korelatów i predyktorów tych postaw. Badania zostały zrealizowane w paradygmacie ilościowym metodą sondażu diagnostycznego z zastosowaniem wystandaryzowanych narzędzi pomiarowych (N = 666).

PROCES WYWODU: Postawy nauczycieli wobec inkluzji edukacyjnej są istotnym czynnikiem efektywności realizacji tej formy kształcenia uczniów niepełnosprawnych. Eksplorowanie czynników regulujących te postawy jest zagadnieniem istotnym zarówno w kontekście teoretycznym, jak i szczególnie w praktycznym.

WYNIKI ANALIZY NAUKOWEJ: Jednym z ważnych wniosków płynących z badania jest to, że postawy nauczycieli wobec inkluzji edukacyjnej są kulturowo zróżnicowane. Najmniej przychylne wobec inkluzji postawy przejawiają nauczyciele niemieccy. Bardziej proinkluzywne postawy przejawiają pracownicy szkół masowych w porównaniu z nauczycielami szkół specjalnych. Płeć nie jest czynnikiem różnicującym postawy wobec inkluzji.

WNIOSKI, REKOMENDACJE I APLIKACYJNE ZNACZENIE BADAŃ: Inkluzja edukacyjna uczniów niepełnosprawnych jest bardzo trudnym i wymagającym zadaniem współczesnej szkoły, którego realizacja wymaga profesjonalnego przygotowania personelu oraz właściwej organizacji przestrzeni i czasu, a także dużego zaangażowania w indywidualizację kształcenia każdego ucznia. Postawy wobec inkluzji są czynnikiem, który może wzmacniać efektywność kształcenia inkluzywnego. Rozwijanie pozytywnych postaw nauczycieli jest więc bardzo ważne. Praktyczne oddziaływania winny bazować na analizie predyktorów prointegracyjnych postaw, aby wzmacniać niezbędne zasoby osobiste.

→ **SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:** INKLUZJA EDUKACYJNA, POSTAWY NAUCZYCIELI, KONTEKST KULTUROWY, TYP SZKOŁY, SPECJALNE POTRZEBY EDUKACYJNE

Introduction

Educational inclusion has become an increasingly universal practice introduced in many countries worldwide to provide a universal education that meets individual student needs. This approach ensures that students, regardless of developmental difficulties and disorders, can learn in the least restrictive, local school setting within their community. Each student that benefits from an inclusive, accessible environment gains agency and the opportunity to pursue their developmental needs in a school accessible to all through a tailored curriculum, necessary support, and a friendly social atmosphere.

The philosophical and legal foundations of inclusive education are rooted in personalistic philosophical concepts and in universally accepted documents created across various systemic levels by modern states and international institutions. Key provisions protecting the dignity of the human person and affirming universal rights to life, education, and development – irrespective of ability – were set forth in the twentieth century in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and later, in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

The pro-inclusion approach to educating students with disabilities has evolved gradually in different countries in response to political changes. In Poland, this approach was initially advocated during the interwar period by Professor Maria Grzegorzewska, and later, in the post-war era, by Professor Aleksander Hulek, who championed the concept of a 'school for all' long before it gained international recognition. The foundation for the development of inclusive education in Poland lies in the commitment of the state authorities to ensure the right to education for all students, as enshrined in Article 70 of the Polish Constitution of 1997 (Konstytucja…, 1997), which states, "Everyone has the right to education, provided with respect to students' special needs." The organization of educational conditions, as well as upbringing and care for children and youth with disabilities, social maladjustment, and those at risk of social maladjustment, is currently governed by the Regulation of the Ministry of Education of 24 July 2017 (Rozporządzenie…, 2017).

Educational inclusion in Germany was initiated in 1988; however, it was not until 1990, under the Child and Youth Welfare Act, that individuals with special educational needs, including disabilities, were allowed to attend either the general or special education system (Przybyszewska, 2016). As a federal country, Germany exhibits differences – particularly in terms of curriculum – among its various Länder. While the central government regulates key legal issues related to education, the specifics of inclusive education can vary based on the legal and political conditions in each state (Kusztal, 2012).

Indonesia ratified the Salamanca Charter in 1997, marking the beginning of inclusive education initiatives. Starting in 2003, students with disabilities were allowed to attend public elementary schools. Furthermore, under Law No. 8 (2016), they have the right to receive reasonable accommodations, defined as modifications and adjustments that are appropriate and necessary to ensure the enjoyment and exercise of all human rights and fundamental freedoms based on equality (Sunardi et al., 2011; Wibowo & Muin, 2018).

In Slovakia, on the other hand, true inclusion of children with disabilities remains elusive, as most pupils with disabilities attend segregated institutions. Despite this, there are some schools, led by passionate and committed principals and teachers, where children learn together, regardless of their abilities (Vančíková et al., 2018). These efforts occur without systemic support or cooperation, and inclusive education is not anchored in Slovak legislation (Cabanová et al., 2022).

Equal access to education at all school levels alongside peers, though widely advocated (Ainscow, 2020), is not universally guaranteed, and many children with disabilities in various regions of the world are unable to attend mainstream public schools. In underdeveloped countries, children with disabilities face severely limited access to education at any level.

Several factors are relevant to inclusive education, such as students' neurodevelopmental disorders (e.g., ASD, Jury et al., 2021) and teachers' skills or resources, including empathy, self-esteem, self-efficacy (Avramidis et al., 2019), epistemological beliefs (Sheehy et al., 2019), and a belief in the importance of fun in the learning and teaching process. A teaching/learning process infused with energy and enthusiasm is a strong predictor of high progress; however, how fun is conceptualized in learning and teaching may vary across countries and cultures (Rofiah et al., 2023). Positive attitudes towards educational inclusion (Kossewska, 2006) have been identified as one of the most important determinants of success in many countries worldwide (Winzer, 1987; Saloviita & Consegnati, 2019; Lindner et al., 2023).

This research aimed to capture cross-cultural differences in teachers' attitudes towards educational inclusion across Indonesia, Poland, Germany, and Slovakia, and to identify the most relevant predictors of these attitudes.

Based on the literature review, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H1. Teachers' attitudes towards educational inclusion vary according to the cultural context of their country of origin.

H2. The type of educational institution influences attitudes towards educational inclusion.

H3. Fun in teaching and learning is a significant correlate of teachers' pro-inclusion attitudes.

H4. Personal resources, such as self-esteem and empathy, significantly predict attitudes towards educational inclusion.

Method and Instruments

In this study, the following instruments in their respective national languages (Indonesian, as translated by Rofiah) were used:

- *The Multidimensional Attitudes Toward Inclusive Education Scale (MATIES):* Based on the Theory Of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), this scale was developed by Marian Mahat (2008) and consists of 18 items on a six-point Likert scale. It is used to assess the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects of teachers' attitudes toward inclusion. The scale has demonstrated good internal reliability, with alpha coefficients of 0.77, 0.78, and 0.91 in sequential tests.
- *The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (SES)*: This 10-item, four-point Likert scale, developed by Morris Rosenberg (1965), is one of the most widely used self-report measures of self-esteem. It assesses global self-worth by evaluating both positive and negative feelings about oneself.
- *The Empathy Quotient (EQ)*: This tool, developed by Greenberg et al. (2018), consists of ten short questions designed to measure adult empathy levels.
- *The Fun In Teaching And Learning Scale*: Developed by Okada and colleagues (Okada & Sheehy, 2020): this scale includes 10 questions on a four-point Likert scale to measure and investigate the importance of incorporating fun into teaching. The reliability of this instrument, as measured by Cronbach's Alpha, was 0.746, indicating that all items are reliable with a relatively high level

Participants

Personal information, including the country, gender, school setting, and contact details of disabled individuals, was collected. Table 1 presents the group characteristics.

Table 1. Characteristics of Participant Groups From Four Countries

	Indonesia		Poland		Germany		Slovakia	
N	279		179		96		112	
Gender	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
	54	225	45	132	16	80	13	99
School setting	Inclusive	Special	Inclusive	Special	Inclusive	Special	Inclusive	Special
	222	57	122	57	66	30	96	16

Own source.

The study enrolled 666 participants aged 22 to 70 (M = 45.74; SD = 17.04). Four subgroups of teachers were formed based on their cultural backgrounds (Indonesian, Polish, German, Slovak). Women were predominant in the study group (n = 536) reflecting the global trend of a feminized teaching profession. Participants completed the survey voluntarily, anonymously, and without financial compensation. Data security was ensured at all times. Questionnaires were distributed via an online form and respondents provided informed consent in the preliminary section of the survey, allowing participation and data processing.

Results

The first step involved computing descriptive statistics, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Dependent Research Variables

	Mean	Med.	SD	Min.	Max.	Skewness		Kurtosis		Shapiro-Wilk	
						Skew.	SE	Kurt.	SE	W	p
Attitudes – Cognitive Aspect	23.37	23.00	5.72	8	36	–0.03	0.09	–0.18	0.19	0.99	<.001
Attitudes – Emotional Aspect	21.15	21.50	7.66	6	36	–0.05	0.09	–0.78	0.19	0.98	<.001
Attitudes – Behavioral Aspect	26.32	28.00	7.64	6	36	–0.92	0.09	0.21	0.19	0.91	<.001
Empathy	8.61	8.00	3.76	0	20	0.54	0.09	–0.15	0.19	0.97	<.001
Self-esteem	24.76	25.00	5.51	10	38	–0.19	0.09	0.19	0.19	0.98	<.001
Fun in Teaching/ Learning	30.47	30.00	4.85	10	40	–0.63	0.09	1.27	0.19	0.96	<.001

Own source.

The skewness and kurtosis values ranged from –1 to 1, suggesting that these deviations were not significant enough to require non-parametric statistics. Therefore, parametric statistics were used for further analysis (Bedyńska & Cypryańska, 2013).

Table 3 presents the cultural and international differences in teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education.

Indonesian teachers demonstrate the most positive attitudes, with significantly higher scores in all three aspects compared to Polish, German, and Slovak teachers. German teachers show the lowest levels of attitudes, which indicates less interest in inclusive education and its implementation compared to teachers from Indonesia, Poland, and Slovakia.

Table 3. One-Way ANOVA (Welch's) and Tukey Post Hoc Test Results

	Country	N	Mean	SD	SE	F	df1	df2	p	Differences/ Post hoc
Attitudes – Cognitive Aspect	ID	279	25.9	4.82	0.288	59.7	3	265	<.001	ID > PL ID > DE ID > SL PL > DE DE < SL
	PL	179	22.5	4.58	0.342					
	DE	96	17.8	5.63	0.575					
	SL	112	23.2	5.67	0.536					
Attitudes – Emotional Aspect	ID	279	23.0	6.33	0.379	117.5	3	286	<.001	ID < PL ID > DE ID > SL PL > DE PL >SL DE < SL
	PL	179	24.8	7.38	0.552					
	DE	96	12.6	5.04	0.515					
	SL	112	18.1	6.31	0.596					
Attitudes – Behavioral Aspect	ID	279	29.3	4.20	0.251	187.2	3	250	<.001	ID > PL ID > DE PL > DE PL < SL DE < SL
	PL	179	25.9	6.32	0.473					
	DE	96	13.9	6.08	0.621					
	SL	112	30.2	6.13	0.580					

Own source.

After controlling for the variables of 'country' and 'gender,' attitudes towards inclusive education were correlated with cognitive aspects related to self-esteem and fun in teaching/learning, emotional aspects related to empathy, and behavioral aspects linked to both self-esteem and teaching/learning enjoyment (see Table 4).

Table 4. Attitudes Towards Inclusive Education and Personal Resources (Empathy, Self-Esteem, and Fun in Teaching/Learning) − Partial Correlation

	Attitudes – Cognitive aspect		Attitudes – Emotional aspect		Attitudes – Behavioral aspect		Empathy		Self-esteem	
Empathy	0.052		0.260	***	0.060		–			
Self-esteem	0.194	***	−0.070		0.097	*	−0.159	***	–	
Fun in Teaching/Learning	0.341	***	−0.009		0.337	***	0.024		0.213	***

Note: * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

Own source.

Table 5. Attitudes Towards School Inclusion in Different School Settings. One-Way ANOVA (Welch's)

	School Setting	N	Mean	SD	SE	F	df1	df2	p
Attitudes – Cognitive Aspect	Inclusive	506	23.96	5.86	0.261	28.90	1	322	<.001
	special	160	21.49	4.80	0.380				
Attitudes – Emotional Aspect	Inclusive	506	21.45	7.46	0.332	2.92	1	247	0.089
	special	160	20.20	8.23	0.650				
Attitudes – Behavioral Aspect	Inclusive	506	26.96	7.30	0.325	13.51	1	241	<.001
	special	160	24.27	8.32	0.658				

Own source.

Teachers working in inclusive or mainstream settings show significantly more positive attitudes towards inclusion in both cognitive and behavioral aspects. However, the emotional aspect was not influenced by the type of school setting in which teachers were employed (see Table 5).

Table 6. Attitudes Towards Inclusive Education and Personal Resources (Empathy, Self-Esteem, and Fun in Teaching/Learning) − Partial Correlation

	Attitudes – Cognitive aspect		Attitudes – Emotional aspect		Attitudes – Behavioral aspect		Empathy		Self-esteem	
Empathy	0.040		0.257	***	0.051		−			
Self-esteem	0.185	***	−0.077	*	0.088	*	−0.164	***	−	
Fun in Teaching/Learning	0.322	***	−0.010		0.324	***	0.018		0.204	***

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Own source.

After controlling for the variables of 'country' and 'school setting,' attitudes towards inclusive education were partially correlated with cognitive aspects of self-esteem and fun in teaching/learning, emotional aspects of empathy and self-esteem, and behavioral aspects of self-esteem and fun in teaching/learning (see Table 6). A linear regression analysis was conducted to identify the best predictors of positive attitudes towards inclusive education. The independent variables were strong predictors of positive attitudes in the cognitive domain ($R = 0.49$; $R^2 = 0.25$; $F(11,446) = 13.458$, $p < 0.001$). School setting explained 25% of the variance in the cognitive attitude aspect ($\beta = -0.20$, $p < 0.05$), with more frequent contact with disabled persons ($\beta = 0.13$, $p < 0.01$), higher empathy ($\beta = 0.13$, $p < 0.01$), and greater enjoyment in teaching and learning ($\beta = 0.20$, $p < 0.001$) contributing to the model.

The independent variables also served as good predictors of positive attitudes in the emotional domain ($R = 0.43$, $R^2 = 0.19$, $F(11,446) = 9.43$, $p < 0.05$). Specifically, more frequent contact with disabled persons ($\beta = 0.15$, $p < 0.001$) and higher empathy ($\beta = 0.35$, $p < 0.001$) accounted for 19% of the variance in emotional attitudes. These

independent variables were strong predictors of positive attitudes and emotional aspects. They also strongly influenced positive attitudes and behavioral aspects ($R = 0.46$, $R^2 = 0.21$, $F(11,446) = 10.765$, $p < 0.001$). Country ($\beta = 0.34$, $p < 0.04$), higher empathy ($\beta = 0.24$, $p < 0.001$), and greater fun in teaching and learning ($\beta = 0.18$, $p < 0.001$) explained 21% of the variance in behavioral attitudes. These independent variables reliably predict positive attitudes in the behavioral domain.

Discussion

Teachers with limited or no experience in interacting with disabled individuals or actively involved in teaching students with special educational needs (SEN) tend to hold significantly less positive attitudes than their more experienced counterparts (Avramidis & Kalyva, 2007). However, effective training is necessary (Jordan et al., 2009) for achieving high competence in inclusive education (Chrzanowska, 2021). Research findings on attitudes towards inclusion are ambiguous; while some studies report accepting attitudes (Gajdzica, 2011) others reveal a less optimistic outlook (Ćwirynkało & Żyta, 2014; Chrzanowska, 2019). Negative assumptions about inclusive education often stem from system-level barriers or limitations in teachers' competence and experience.

The social relevance of inclusive education is becoming increasingly recognized worldwide. A comparative study of teachers' attitudes across four countries found that Indonesian teachers show more pro-inclusive attitudes compared to European teachers, which likely reflects Indonesia's unique cultural background. Conversely, German teachers are the least favorable towards inclusion, despite Germany's exemplary inclusive schools and media emphasis on the success of education for all students (Powell, 2016). Nevertheless, the German educational model remains segregated, and many teachers maintain a skeptical view of inclusion. This less favorable attitude may result from a more thorough understanding of the needs of students with disabilities, who often require specialized methods that cannot be provided in larger, inclusive classrooms.

Empathy is a key predictor of positive attitudes toward inclusion. Understanding the emotional states of others is important for all human interactions (Navarro-Mateu et al., 2019), particularly in the teaching profession. A central aspect of teachers' work is building relationships with students, parents, colleagues, and administrators. Teachers who demonstrate empathy are better equipped to develop satisfying relationships with students, which helps them pursue meaningful educational goals (Barłóg, 2018; Grabowiec, 2018).

A positive relationship was found between teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education and their beliefs about the enjoyment of teaching and learning, specifically in the cognitive and behavioral domains, whereas no such correlation was observed in the emotional domain. Teachers are the single most significant factor in fostering fun and positivity in the classroom; thus, emphasizing the learning process over outcomes, effort over achievement, and the value of risk-taking and mistakes can lead to high levels of student engagement and happiness (Tisza & Markopoulos, 2021). Teachers' belief in the importance of

enjoyable learning experiences can shape their attitudes toward teaching and handling students with disabilities in their classrooms and influence how they feel about their role in the school environment. Research with Indonesian teachers indicates that their perceptions of happiness and, implicitly, fun in learning strongly impact their attitudes toward learning as a crucial element of effective classroom instruction (Sheehy et al., 2019).

Behavioral attitudes toward inclusion, like cognitive attitudes, show a significant correlation with the enjoyment of learning. This indicator suggests that the more a teacher enjoys teaching, the more willing they are to adapt the curriculum to meet the students' needs, regardless of students' abilities. Most respondents express enthusiasm for encouraging students with disabilities to be socially active in the classroom and demonstrate readiness to adjust communication strategies and include students with emotional and behavioral difficulties.

Conclusions

The educational inclusion of students with disabilities is a very complex and demanding task for modern schools. Its successful implementation requires well-prepared staff, proper organization of space and time, and a strong commitment to tailoring education to the needs of each student. Positive attitudes towards inclusion can enhance the effectiveness of inclusive education. Therefore, fostering positive attitudes among teachers is essential. Practical interventions should be based on analyzing the predictors of pro-inclusion attitudes in order to strengthen the necessary personal resources.

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