



Teacher Preparedness for Inclusive Classrooms: Evaluating Competencies, Challenges, Training Needs and Barriers to Educational Inclusion in Initial Teacher Training

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Abstract:

Introduction: Inclusive education is a worldwide approach that aims to incorporate students with varying learning requirements. However, many educators do not have sufficient training to provide inclusive practices. This study evaluated teacher preparedness for inclusive classrooms, focusing on the competencies, training needs, and barriers faced by teachers.

Methodology: The study used mixed methods which involved the use of a questionnaire of 395 teachers and semi-structured interviews with eight participants who were teacher education students and trainee teachers of primary education. EFA and CFA were used to analyse the data.

Results: The results showed that 63% of the respondents had received formal training in inclusive education, but only 41.7% were confident in managing diverse classrooms. Teacher preparedness and training programs had significant negative correlations with perceived barriers. Teaching competency was significantly and positively associated with teacher preparedness and training programs. Moreover, no significant relationship was observed between teacher needs and teacher preparedness and training programs. Qualitative results indicated the following major problems: resource constraints, lack of training, and overcrowded classrooms.

Conclusion: The results indicate that teacher training programmes must provide more practical field-based experiences to better equip teachers to work in inclusive classrooms. Policymakers should incorporate exposure in the teacher curriculum, overcome obstacles such as lack of resources, and enhance teacher support mechanisms.

Keywords: Inclusive education, teacher preparedness, teacher competencies, teacher training, teacher needs.

1. INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education has attracted considerable attention as a concept that addresses the issue of educational equity and social inclusion through the education of all students, including those with disabilities, using general education classrooms (Ainscow, 2020; Jardinez & Natividad, 2024). However, the implementation of these practices in teacher training has not been consistent. This issue is even more alarming because teachers' preparedness to implement these practices in education is the cornerstone of the concept (Gyamfi & Yeboah, 2022). This view is verified through the assertions made by (Sharma & Gill, 2024) that the core of the issue of inclusive

education is the extent to which students with diverse education aim to attain high learning standards in an atmosphere where diversity is valued. Indeed, the effectiveness of the concept of education is dependent on the competencies and attitudes that teachers possess in relation to students with special education needs (Boyle *et al.*, 2020; Karynbaeva *et al.*, 2022). Evidence attests that the perceptions of these respondents are positive towards the impact of the issue of education. In contrast, there is a disparity between the knowledge and preparedness of the teaching community on the issue, with the view that they are not prepared in their teaching practices, even when they are able to adapt their teaching practices to accommodate the whole range of classroom education (Butakor *et al.*, 2020; Boyle *et al.*,

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2022). Regarding the preparedness of teachers in the training process initiated through the education system to ensure that they implement the concept in the future, the assertions made by (Kimhi & Nir, 2025) and the work presented by (Materechera, 2020) provide sufficient evidence.

The lack of training of teachers to work in inclusive classrooms is the problem examined in this study, although the policy of inclusive education is generally supported. Although the inclusion of students with different learning requirements into general education classrooms is accepted as a strategy for enhancing equitable learning and social inclusion around the world (Ainscow, 2020; Sharma & Gill, 2024), teacher training programs do not always provide proper preparation for teachers to meet this challenge. Research has revealed that inclusive education is not taught in the core curriculum of most teacher training programmes (Kimhi & Nir, 2025), and teachers are ill-equipped to handle classrooms with diverse groups of learners. Although teachers are trained to provide inclusive education, the gap between theory and practice is typically very high (Savolainen *et al.*, 2022). Teachers often express a positive attitude toward inclusion but do not have the practical skills to implement effective inclusion strategies (Boyle *et al.*, 2022; Ismailos *et al.*, 2022). Moreover, high levels of resources, large classes, and weak support systems contribute to systemic obstacles (Pasha & Ijaz, 2021). This unpreparedness compromises effective inclusion education and influences the quality of teaching for pupils with special educational needs.

This study applies Teacher Self-Efficacy Theory as the sensitising framework that (Bandura, 1977) developed to help elucidate the findings. The theory is applied to conceptually explain the interconnection between teachers' beliefs about their potential and their readiness to engage in inclusive education in certain institutional and contextual circumstances. According to previous studies (Bhati & Sethy, 2022; Gordon *et al.*, 2023), self-efficacy is a valuable perspective for explaining the interaction of personal abilities, professional experiences, and environmental limitations to determine how such factors influence teachers' perceived practice readiness. Teacher competency in this study is comprehended as the origin of efficacy beliefs and is operationalised in self-reported confidence and a perceived mastery of inclusive strategies, which are in line with Bandura's statement that such beliefs mediate effort and persistence in the face of professional challenges, as suggested by (Lazarides & Warner, 2020).

The conceptualisation of teacher preparedness is the perceived preparedness, not the actual instructional performance, because the perception of readiness is subjective. Perceived barriers are addressed as environmental restrictions that inform teachers' confidence and restrict the implementation of inclusive practices, in line with the evidence that situational factors can sabotage efficacy beliefs in the presence of underlying competencies (Hussain *et al.*, 2022). The interpretation of teacher training programmes as guided professional experiences with the potential to bring about efficacy development through guided practice and feedback does not presuppose homogenous or automatic effects. Although the needs of teachers are also considered, their existence is not expected to improve preparedness, and this aspect serves to prove that Bandura does not believe that an

individual can become prepared through the knowledge of the idea of efficacy, and no actual experiences are required. The limitation of placing Self-Efficacy Theory into this perspective is that it serves to avoid over-theorisation and keeps theory and constructs in line with empirical evidence, which positions theory in a contextualising role and not in a prescriptive role when making measurement or predictive relationship assertions.

Despite the commitments and aims of global policies, many training programs do not prepare teachers sufficiently to meet the demands of inclusive education in the classroom (Pasha & Ijaz, 2021). While most teachers have a positive attitude toward inclusive education, there has been an imbalance between theory and practice in many cases, and there is a need for training and experience in special education, as well as assistance infrastructure (Savolainen *et al.*, 2022). In addition, factors such as a lack of resources and infrastructure in the form of huge class sizes and inadequate training and assistance infrastructure are also complicating factors in the effective implementation of inclusive education strategies in the classroom (Ismailos *et al.*, 2022).

This research aims to evaluate the issues surrounding the training and preparedness of teachers and the barriers experienced by teachers in training to meet the demands of inclusive education in the classroom. There is a clear need to conduct this study because, while global commitments to inclusive education are on the rise, there are still gaps in teacher-training programmes that are not well equipped to prepare teachers for inclusive classrooms. (Scarparolo & Subban, 2021) pointed out large discrepancies in the attitudes, self-efficacy, and practical preparedness of teachers, with a special emphasis on their competency in managing diverse classrooms. Thus, teachers often graduate with limited exposure to inclusive teaching strategies and practical field experiences, hindering the translation of theoretical knowledge into effective classroom practice (Resch & Schrittmesser, 2023). Furthermore, there is a lack of research that sheds light on quantitative measures, such as competencies and training exposure, with qualitative insights into the lived experiences of teachers and contextual barriers. This study contributes to the inclusive education literature by refining the application of the Teacher Self-Efficacy Theory. The study does not only focus on the individual teacher attributes, but also highlights the contextual barriers, including limited access to resources, support systems, and training which affect teacher efficacy beliefs and their perceived readiness for inclusive classrooms. The findings of the study depict that the competency of teachers, combined with the level of training experience and environmental constraints, also determines the preparedness of the teacher for inclusive education.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Theoretical Framework

Teacher self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1994) is applied as a sensitising perspective to aid in understanding how teachers perceive their readiness for inclusive education through personal and contextual experiences, which leads to the development of their beliefs or sense of efficacy. The theory does not presume direct causal pathways; rather, individuals

consider professional opportunities and constraints based on their perceived capabilities, as suggested by (Woodcock *et al.*, 2022). This definition of teacher competency in this study focuses on teacher-reported skills and knowledge, and mirrors teacher efficacy beliefs. According to (San Martin *et al.*, 2021), this approach led to more favourable judgements about teacher training programs by teachers who feel more competent, as efficacy belief is linked to the interpretation and appraisal of professional learning experiences. This is in line with (Bandura's, 1977) view that self-efficacy influences, rather than merely being a consequence of, cognitive evaluations of learning environments.

Likewise, teachers' interpretations of professional support are shaped by the environmental constraints they consider barriers. According to (Metsala & Harkins, 2020), Self-Efficacy Theory suggests that barriers in the environment can impact teachers' self-confidence and affect what they anticipate developmentally supportive opportunities will enable them to do. Likewise, teachers who believe that there is less institutional support may be less satisfied with teacher training programs that meet the needs of inclusive classrooms. This interpretation is similar to that of (Woodcock *et al.*, 2023), who found that contextual factors affect teachers' confidence in and interest in school professional development opportunities, and (Bandura, 1994) study on teachers' participation in professional learning activities, indicates that teachers' confidence and engagement with professional learning opportunities vary within school contexts. Therefore, it is important to consider the proposed relationships as perceptual associations based on efficacy beliefs and environmental appraisals rather than deterministic causal pathways furthermore to explore the relationship between personal competencies and contextual barriers with perceptions of teacher training programs in inclusive education contexts.

2.2. Empirical Review

The importance of the interaction of individual teacher characteristics with the context in which teaching takes place has increasingly been acknowledged in the practice of Inclusive Education. In this context, perceived barriers have consistently been identified as important factors in teachers' preparedness to engage in inclusive practices. The study carried out (Adesokan & Bojuwoye, 2023) found that poor facilities, negative attitudes, and non-inclusion by peers were significant challenges for effective inclusion. The same was reported by (Zwane & Malale, 2018) in the context of Swaziland, where the preparation of teachers and lack of facilities led to limitations in their capacity to cater to diverse learners. Both studies emphasised structural challenges but lacked descriptive and qualitative designs, limiting the ability to fully understand the connection between structural challenges and preparedness. However, according to Teacher Self-Efficacy Theory, the concept of environmental constraints affects teachers' self-efficacy in performing learning tasks well. Thus, ongoing challenges in inclusive classrooms are likely to negatively affect teachers and students' perceptions of their preparedness for the classroom, whereas ongoing success is likely to have a positive impact.

Perceived barriers impact not only the implementation of interventions in the classroom but also question the preparedness of teacher training institutes. (Arnaiz-Sánchez *et al.*, 2023) suggested that some obstacles to inclusive education can be found in teacher education, which tends to be theoretical without having much practical relevance and does not build competencies. Likewise, (Zwane & Malale, 2018) reported that teachers' effectiveness in responding to learner diversity was limited due to insufficient professional development and poor institutional support. The results showed that there are not only external obstacles in classrooms but also obstacles that are enclosed within the training system. Nonetheless, (Arnaiz-Sánchez *et al.*, 2023) explored barriers descriptively, with little evidence connecting barriers to perceptions of teacher preparation programs. This restriction makes it difficult to understand whether the negative feedback it receives is the result of a problem with the program or whether external factors still prevent teachers from using the program in the classroom.

Another core element of inclusive education is teacher competency, which is often associated with readiness for inclusive classrooms. (Majoko, 2019) recognised differentiation, assessment, collaboration, classroom management, and behavioural management as key skills necessary for effective inclusion. These findings align with those of (Aldabas, 2020), who found a correlation between teachers' professional experiences and their confidence in inclusive teaching. Overall, the studies found that preparedness is related to competency in two ways: building efficacy beliefs and perceived capability. However, there are some methodological limitations. The numbers of respondents in (Majoko, 2019) were small a qualitative sample, while (Aldabas, 2020) used self-reported perceptions rather than observing preparedness. For this reason, preparedness and competency remain a perceptual, and not a behavioural, relationship. This is significant, as teachers might feel confident in their ability to practice inclusion but may not be able to do so in classrooms or schools.

Comparatively little has been reported on the relationship between teacher effectiveness and training programs. Previously, evidence was found that teacher training programs are supposed to acquire competencies for inclusive education, and there were still significant differences in terms of effectiveness. (Arnaiz-Sánchez *et al.*, 2023) noted that there are significant gaps in the competencies acquired during their initial teacher education, while (Triviño-Amigo *et al.*, 2022) reported that many teachers felt unprepared for the diversity of learners at the conclusion of their initial teacher education. The results suggest that perceptions of training quality are closely linked to the extent of competency development in training programs. However, most current studies consider training as a standalone experience rather than looking at training and competency outcomes together, thus limiting their capacity to analyse whether positive perceptions of training come from skill development or attitudes towards professional learning.

The literature also indicates that teachers' needs are another significant factor that impacts preparedness for inclusive classrooms, but a factor that is different from the above. (Stites

et al., 2018) concluded that pre-service teachers revealed significant gaps in their development and were unsure about their ability to teach in inclusive environments. Similarly, (Triviño-Amigo *et al.*, 2022) reported that, although teachers had positive attitudes towards inclusion, many desired further professional development opportunities. These findings suggest that raising awareness of professional needs is only a sign of needs being identified and not necessarily a sign of preparedness for addressing those needs. A teacher's perception of deficiencies does not necessarily lead to an increase in confidence or readiness, as Teacher Self-Efficacy Theory suggests that such beliefs are built up in the course of success and mastery experiences, as indicated by (Scarpapolo & Subban, 2021). Therefore, the link between teacher needs and preparedness remains theoretically not fully understood and empirically under-researched.

However, perceptions of teacher training programs are also closely associated with teachers' needs, as this often leads to a call for further teacher development. The findings of the two studies by (Stites *et al.*, 2018; and Triviño-Amigo *et al.*, 2022) are consistent in showing that teachers desire improved opportunities for participating in inclusive practices, opportunities for increased conceptual understanding, and opportunities for increased practical preparation. However, (Triviño-Amigo *et al.*, 2022) mainly concentrated on identifying needs without exploring how they affect training effectiveness perceptions. Therefore, the influence of professionals acknowledged needs on the assessment of professional training programs is still underexplored.

Teacher training programs play a pivotal role in the literature on inclusive education, as they are seen as central to the development of preparedness. Based on this, the results of the studies are inconclusive. (Stites *et al.*, 2018) emphasised that the conceptual understanding of pre-service teachers was insufficient, while (Arnaiz-Sánchez *et al.*, 2023) criticised the predominance of theoretical approaches of theory only and without considering practical aspects in teaching. The practical aspects, in turn, have reported greater acceptance of CPD than of initial teacher training, as have the teachers in (Triviño-Amigo *et al.*, 2022), who saw CPD in a positive light overall, with the exception of initial teacher training. (Gonzaga *et al.*, 2024), highlighted that continuous professional development should be provided in the future despite generally positive perceptions of initial teacher training. Together, these results indicate that teacher preparation efforts that engage teachers in applied learning, collaboration, and hands-on experience are more effective in building teachers' preparedness. According to Teacher Self-efficacy Theory, these experiences help build efficacy beliefs that lead to teachers' feelings of readiness for inclusive classrooms. However, existing studies have examined barriers, competency, teacher needs, training programs, or preparedness separately. However, little evidence has been brought together in a single analytical framework that takes them into account, especially in low-resource educational environments, which is why the present study is warranted.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

The present study used a cross-sectional design to assess teacher preparedness for inclusive classrooms. According to (Hunziker & Blankenagel, 2024), a cross-sectional design can capture a snapshot of teacher competencies, training needs, and perceived barriers to inclusion at a single point in time. To assess teacher preparedness, this study employed a combination of Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). These techniques are much more viable because they can identify and validate the factors that represent the underlying factors of competencies and perceived barriers. EFA was conducted to identify latent constructs of teacher preparedness, such as teaching strategies, the level of confidence, and general perception of challenges inherent in teaching inclusively.

For this study, teacher need is defined as the need felt by teachers for more support to implement EFA effectively. The construct is specifically for self-reported needs for additional training opportunities, practical guidance, instructional materials, and professional support needed to manage diverse learners in inclusive classrooms. This does not indicate a lack of content knowledge or skill deficits, but rather teachers' views of areas that they wish to develop in order for them to be more confident and effective in delivering inclusive practice. Teacher need is thus explored as a perceptual construct which relates to teachers' perceived readiness for inclusive classrooms and their assessments of teacher training programmes.

3.2. Data Collection and Instruments

The structured questionnaire was divided into two parts: demographic data (Appendix A) and statements that captured teacher preparedness, barriers to inclusion, and the perceived adequacy of training (Appendix B). The critical objective of the research design was to fully understand the competencies and the gaps that they felt current teacher training programmes possessed. Subsequent to the EFA, the confirmation exercise was conducted to establish the robustness of the factors identified during the EFA and to establish the validity of the model. This validation process was essential in ensuring that the identified constructs, such as competencies in inclusive teaching and perceived barriers, represented the underlying dimensions of teacher preparedness that are relevant for effective inclusive education. The CFA stage provided an opportunity to test some hypotheses regarding the relationship between these factors, including the association between teacher preparedness and perceived barriers on classroom preparedness for inclusion.

In the current study, teacher competency was operationalised as self-reported skills and knowledge associated with inclusive teaching practices. In addition, the teacher training program refers to the reported exposure of the participants to components of formal training, coursework, and professional development activities associated with inclusive education. Finally, teacher preparedness is described as self-

perceived readiness to apply and adopt inclusive practices, instead of observed or objectively measured teaching effectiveness.

Using a structured survey questionnaire, a survey was conducted with 395 teacher education students and trainee teachers in teacher education programs that serve primary education. Approximately 765 questionnaires were sent through online platforms. Amongst 765 questionnaires sent, 410 were returned with a 53.59% response rate. After screening the data, 15 responses were dropped because of lack of data and outlier scores, leaving a total of 395 responses for quantitative analysis. Convenience sampling was also used to select the sample because it enabled the inclusion of easily available participants who were undergoing teacher training. This method was feasible considering time and resource limitations because it was possible to collect data on participants who were readily accessible and willing to take part in the study (Hair *et al.*, 2017).

Convenience sampling eased admittance to participants with direct involvement and experience in teacher education. However, this method does not allow for generalisation and may lead to sampling bias due to the greater availability and willingness of participants involved in this study. Even though this sampling can reduce the potential to generalise, it can be used in studies that are exploratory in nature, that is, the main goal is to obtain information about a given but easily accessible population. The respondents were requested to provide demographic information, including age, gender, professional teaching experience, and self-reported readiness for inclusive teaching. As suggested by (Fuller *et al.*, 2016), Harman's single-factor test was administered to eliminate common method variance (CMV) due to self-report measures, and the first factor explained the total variance that was below 50 percent, meaning that there was no significant bias.

Furthermore, full collinearity VIF was also analysed to address CMB, where as suggested by (Castillo *et al.*, 2026), VIF values below 3.3 threshold level validated no issue of CMB in the model. In addition, procedures such as anonymous responses and care in the wording of the items were used to limit the possible effects of methods to ensure that the relationships considered among teacher competency, perceived barriers, training exposure, and preparedness were based on construct-level relationships and not on artefacts of measurement.

Moreover, a sample of eight semi-structured interviews with a heterogeneous population of teacher education students and trainee teachers was conducted. The interviews were conducted using unstructured and open-ended questionnaires, as depicted in (Appendix C), with a sample of (n=8) participants. The method enabled the participants to expound on their answers in the questionnaire and was conducted for around 50 minutes as participants were asked about the challenges that they encountered, what training they underwent, and how they could be well included in classrooms. The interviews were structured

in a loose format, whereby the respondents were open-ended, but the interviewers targeted certain areas, such as barriers to inclusion, training gaps, and teacher preparedness. Each interview was tape-recorded with the consent of the participant and transcribed to conduct a thematic analysis, which allowed gaining a better idea of the lived experiences of the teachers and the contextual variables that affect their willingness to engage in inclusive education.

3.3. Data Analysis

The data were divided into two components to improve the strength of the research and reduce the impact of bias. To enhance the study and minimise bias, the overall sample (N = 395) was divided into two datasets. The first dataset (A) was a sample of (n=158) respondents (40% of the entire sample) of the data that was subjected to Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) to determine and explore the factor structure that explains teacher competencies, training needs, and barriers to inclusive education. This aligns with (Beavers *et al.*, 2013; and Sürücü *et al.*, 2024) implying 150, as the minimum and adequate observations for EFA. The remaining sample (60%) (n=237) formed Dataset B and was used in Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) to validate the factor structure and analyse the relationship between independent and dependent constructs. The allocation of the participants to the two datasets was done through a computer-generated randomisation procedure to avoid bias. This data fragmentation method has been common in empirical studies to circumvent the capitalisation of chance and to guarantee that the factor structure has been validated on another subsample of data, and thus the outcome of the research is made more reliable.

With respect to the data analysis tools to be used in the study, the EFA was done using SPSS, and the CFA was done using PLS-SEM using SmartPLS. Although EFA and CFA are different methods, PLS-SEM integrates both CFA and path analysis in a single integrated model, which enables both the measurement and structural models to be analysed simultaneously. Additionally, the qualitative interviews were analysed using the thematic analysis approach of data familiarisation, coding, theme development, and refinement, as proposed by (Byrne, 2022). All audio tapes from the interviews were transcribed verbatim and repeatedly read to become familiar with the participants' responses. From this point, the transcripts were coded to derive meaning for teacher preparedness, perceived barriers, teacher competency, training experiences and teacher needs. Coding was done both inductively to identify emerging patterns and with regard to the study constructs. A second researcher independently reviewed the transcripts and coding framework, and where discrepancies occurred in coding, these were discussed and resolved to reach a consensus, achieving an inter-coder reliability of 85%. Subsequently, similar codes were grouped into larger categories, which were analysed and synthesised into final

themes based on their similarities, differences, and relations with participant responses. Contextual explanations for the quantitative results were generated using the developed themes, rather than theoretical explanations.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Demographics.

As per Table 1, the demographic profile of the 395 participants showed that 28% were males, 59% were females, 5% reported others, and 8% preferred not to answer. Regarding the age demographics, most participants were in the age group–18-25 years (29%) and 26-35 years (28%) age groups. 36-45 (20%) and 46 and above (23%) age brackets were the most common. In terms of educational qualifications, most respondents held a bachelor’s degree (34%), (53%) had a master’s degree, and (13%) had a doctorate. The distribution provided insight into the educational background of the participants, which is relevant in interpreting the views of the individuals concerning teacher preparedness. The table also shows the duration of school practicum between the respondents. A considerable percentage (29%) had 3-6 months of school practicum, (24%) had 7-12 months and (34%) had more than 12 months of school practicum. Meanwhile, 63% of the participants agreed to have attended formal teaching of inclusive education, and 37% did not.

Table 1. Demographics.

Demographic Category	Option	Frequency (N=395)	Percentage (%)
Age	18-25	115	29%
	26-35	110	28%
	36-45	80	20%
	46 and above	90	23%
Gender	Male	110	28%
	Female	235	59%
	Other	20	5%
	Prefer not to answer	30	8%
Current Educational Level	Bachelor's Degree	135	34%
	Master's Degree	210	53%
	Doctorate Degree	50	13%
Duration of School Practicum	Less than 3 Months	50	13%
	3-6 Months	115	29%
	7-12 Months	95	24%
	More than 12 months	135	34%
Formal Training in Inclusive Education	Yes	250	63%
	No	145	37%

4.2. Exploratory Factor Analysis

4.2.1. KMO and Bartlett's Test

As per Table 2, The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value of 0.878, in this case, implies that the data is very appropriate in the analysis of factors. The closer the KMO values are to 1, the better the data are correlated, and the fact that the factor analysis may yield significant results (Shrestha, 2021). With a value far above the 0.6 level, the KMO score indicates that the relationships between variables are sufficient to facilitate the determination of underlying factors (Zhang *et al.*, 2024). Furthermore, the Test of Sphericity by Bartlett provided further evidence that the data were suitable for inclusion in the factor analysis. The chi-square value was found to be 3931.412 with 105 degrees of freedom and a p-value of 0.000 which means that the correlation matrix is not identity. This outcome shows that the variables have acceptable correlations which are important in the process of factor analysis to discover meaningful patterns. The level of significance (*p*-value < 0.05) indicates that the data are not random and that the relationships observed are not artificial which supports the validity of the extracted factors. The fact that the *p*-value is much lower than the accepted 0.05 value proves that the variables are connected in such a manner that the process of extracting the factors is justified. Therefore, the KMO and Bartlett tests are complementary to each other, and the data will be suitable for factor analysis so that accurate and interpretable factors can be retrieved that would lead to significant results.

Table 2. KMO and bartlett's test.

Test	Value
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy	0.878
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square
Degrees of Freedom (df)	105
Significance (Sig.)	0.000
Chi-Square X ²	3931.412

4.3. Rotated Component Matrix

Table 3 presents the rotated component matrix obtained from exploratory factor analysis. The results show strong loading of all items on their respective factors which means adequate item-structure congruences between the measurement items and the constructs. The items related to Teacher Preparedness were Q13, Q14, and Q15, and the items related to Teacher Competency were Q1, Q2, and Q3. Likewise, the Teachers Training Program, Teacher Needs, and Perceived Barriers were represented by their corresponding items, and the factor loadings ranged from 0.676 to 0.919. The loading pattern was observed which is indicative of the multidimensional structure of the measurement instrument, and indicates that the items being retained are valid representatives of the constructs the instrument was designed to measure. Although Factors 4 and 5 accounted for less variance, they were included as conceptually important dimensions of the study and showed good loadings. In general, the findings of the EFA indicate

Table 3. Rotated component matrix.

Rotated Component Matrix						
	-	Component				
		1	2	3	4	5
Teacher Preparedness	Q14	0.919	-	-	-	-
	Q15	0.866	-	-	-	-
	Q13	0.829	-	-	-	-
Teacher Competency	Q2	-	0.857	-	-	-
	Q1	-	0.773	-	-	-
	Q3	-	0.756	-	-	-
Teacher Training Program	Q11	-	-	0.844	-	-
	Q10	-	-	0.815	-	-
	Q12	-	-	0.783	-	-
Teacher Needs	Q9	-	-	-	0.798	-
	Q8	-	-	-	0.778	-
	Q7	-	-	-	0.676	-
Perceived Barriers	Q5	-	-	-	-	0.851
	Q4	-	-	-	-	0.804
	Q6	-	-	-	-	0.728

empirical support for the construct structure adopted for the confirmatory analysis.

4.4. Total Variance

Table 4 presents the Total Variance Explained, which indicates the contribution of each component to the total variance in the data. The former has the highest percentage of variance of 45.871%, indicating that it is the most dominant in explaining the structure of the data. The second and third components account for 13.096% and 9.401%, respectively, and reveal that the first three components cumulatively explain close to 68% of the total variance. The other components play a smaller role, and the fourth and fifth components constitute 6.462% and 5.340% of the variance, respectively, and there is a decreasing role of the subsequent components. The items that made up these components had clear theoretical interpretability and were associated with the conceptually distinct constructs mentioned in the study framework, thus allowing the two components to be retained, although the eigenvalues were below the Kaiser criterion (eigenvalue > 1.0). Furthermore, the contents of these factors were found to have acceptable factor loadings, with all of them being dimensions of an inclusive, which are considered important to explain teacher preparedness for inclusive education. The property of retaining all items of the eigenvector, based solely on the criterion of a large eigenvalue, was, therefore, not the only basis for retention in this study. This is because retaining any item of the eigenvector based exclusively on a large eigenvalue was not the only criterion for retention. The Exploratory Factor Analysis led to the development of the following hypotheses after naming the variables that were dominant in each factor:

Table 4. Total variance explained.

Component	Initial Eigenvalues	Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings
	Total	% of Variance
1	6.881	45.871
2	1.964	13.096
3	1.410	9.401
4	0.969	6.462
5	0.801	5.340

4.5. Hypotheses.

H1: Perceived barriers to inclusive education have a statistically significant relationship with teacher preparedness for inclusive education.

H2: Perceived barriers to inclusive education have a statistically significant relationship with perceptions of the teacher training programs.

H3: Teacher competency is significantly related to teacher preparedness for inclusive classrooms.

H4: Teacher competency is significantly related to perceptions of teacher training programs.

H5: Teacher needs are significantly associated with teacher preparedness for inclusive classrooms.

H6: Teacher needs have a statistically significant association with the perception of teacher training programs.

H7: Teacher training programs have a statistically significant predictive relationship with teacher preparedness for inclusive teaching.

4.6. Confirmatory Factor Analysis

The items from the previous analysis were renamed and tested for CFA.

4.6.1. Measurement Model Using Confirmatory Factor Analysis

The CFA results, Table 5 suggests that Perceived Barriers, Teacher Competency, Teacher Need, Teacher Preparedness, and Teacher Training Programme have strong internal consistency and convergent validity. The Cronbach's alpha values (0.812 to 0.893) were above the established cut-off (0.7), proving high reliability. The composite reliability coefficients of 0.815-0.899 also show that the measurement items can measure the latent constructs on which they are based. Individually, all the indicators had factor loadings greater than 0.8, indicating that each item was an effective measure of its construct. The AVE values are between 0.727 and 0.832, which proves that most of the variance in every construct is covered by its items. The items were not omitted because of their theoretical relevance and because they had high factor loadings that would guarantee that the constructs were conceptually and empirically meaningful. In general, the CFA provides a solid and consistent measurement model that confirms the consistency in the alignment of the items and constructs, and easily notifies overlapping patterns in certain items. This background assists in further structural analysis and elucidation of the predictive associations between the research variables.

Table 5. Reliability and convergent validity.

Constructs	Indicators	Factor Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Perceived Barriers	PB1	0.892	0.881	0.882	0.808
	PB2	0.925			
	PB3	0.879			
Teacher Competency	TC1	0.880	0.852	0.854	0.772
	TC2	0.899			
	TC3	0.856			
Teacher Need	TN1	0.815	0.812	0.815	0.727
	TN2	0.899			
	TN3	0.842			
Teacher Preparedness	TP1	0.909	0.893	0.903	0.823
	TP2	0.934			
	TP3	0.878			
Teacher Training Program	TTP1	0.904	0.899	0.899	0.832
	TTP2	0.928			
	TTP3	0.903			

Table 6 shows the discriminant validity of the constructs, determined using the values of the HTMT ratio against a threshold of 0.8. It allows to analyse conceptual overlapping, distinctiveness and separability among between Perceived Barriers, Teacher Competency, Teacher Need, Teacher Preparedness, and Teacher Training Program. As per the criteria provided by (Henseler *et al.*, 2015), the constructs should be separated from each other, and the HTMT values should not be greater than 0.85 to establish the discriminant validity. Perceived Barriers and Teacher Competency possess an HTMT ratio of (0.720<0.85) which means no conceptual overlapping, but distinctiveness among variables. Similarly, Teacher Competency and Teacher Need (0.626) and Teacher Need and Teacher Preparedness (0.352) also show no conceptual overlap, and the variables are separated from each other. Similarly, this is the case for all constructs in the measurement model. The results validate that the constructs of this research are properly differentiated, indicating no overlap.

4.7. Path Analysis

The path analysis results presented in Table 7 indicate a strong predictive relationship among the constructs used in the current study. The direct relationship of Perceived Barriers with Teacher Preparedness is negative and significant ($\beta = -0.303$, $p = 0.000$), indicating that an increase in perceived barriers in the learning environment is associated with a decrease in teacher preparedness. Moreover, the Teacher Training Program is also significantly associated with Perceived Barriers ($\beta = -0.501$, $p = 0.000$), which means that the barriers that negatively affect the education system have a significant negative relationship with the effectiveness of training programs. On the

other hand, Teacher Competency also held a positive and significant predictive relationship with Teacher Preparedness ($\beta = 0.163$, $p = 0.027$). The association of Teacher Competency with the Teacher Training Program is positive ($\beta = 0.192$, $p = 0.002$), indicating that teacher training programs are positively connected with teachers' competency, which also shows that structured training exposure leads to the development of skills and knowledge of teachers in an inclusive education environment.

Additionally, Teacher Need was positively but statistically insignificantly related to Teacher Preparedness ($\beta = 0.131$, $p = 0.062$) leading to the rejection of H5. Moreover, there is a positive and significant association between the Teacher Training Program and Teacher Preparedness ($\beta = 0.278$, $p = 0.001$), which ascertains that the designed training program substantially enhances the readiness of teachers in inclusive classrooms. Lastly, the results also revealed a statistically insignificant relationship between Teacher Need and Teacher Training Program ($\beta = 0.068$, $p = 0.233$), which led to the rejection of H6. Grounded on Cohen's effect size criteria, the results of f-square are analysed in terms of small, medium, and large effects. As shown in Table 7, perceived barriers had a moderate effect on the Teacher Training Program ($f^2 = 0.269$) along with a small effect size on Teacher Preparedness ($f^2 = 0.056$). The results also revealed that Teacher Competency and Teacher Need had small effect sizes on Teacher Preparedness and Teacher Training Program. Likewise, the Teacher Training Program had a small effect on Teacher Preparedness ($f^2 = 0.056$).

Table 6. Discriminant validity.

Constructs	Perceived Barriers	Teacher Competency	Teacher Need	Teacher Preparedness
Perceived Barriers	-	-	-	-
Teacher Competency	0.720	-	-	-
Teacher Need	0.557	0.626	-	-
Teacher Preparedness	0.497	0.281	0.352	-
Teacher Training Program	0.733	0.617	0.472	0.486

Table 7. Path coefficients.

-	Coefficients	T statistics	P values	F-square
Perceived Barriers -> Teacher Preparedness	-0.303	3.760	0.000	0.056
Perceived Barriers -> Teacher Training Program	-0.501	8.670	0.000	0.269
Teacher Competency -> Teacher Preparedness	0.163	2.212	0.027	0.019
Teacher Competency -> Teacher Training Program	0.192	3.133	0.002	0.037
Teacher Need -> Teacher Preparedness	0.131	1.864	0.062	0.016
Teacher Need -> Teacher Training Program	0.068	1.193	0.233	0.006
Teacher Training Program -> Teacher Preparedness	0.278	3.179	0.001	0.056

4.8. Predictive Relevance

The Q^2_{predict} results shown in Table 8 revealed satisfactory predictive relevance for the endogenous variables in the model. The teacher training program demonstrated robust predictive relevance and capability ($Q^2_{\text{predict}} = 0.442$), similar to Teacher Preparedness ($Q^2_{\text{predict}} = 0.191$). In addition, the values of MAE and RMSE show rational accuracy of prediction with less error and validate that the structural model holds satisfactory out-of-sample predictive performance in the case of both constructs.

Table 8. Predictive relevance.

-	Q^2_{predict}	RMSE	MAE
Teacher training program	0.442	0.752	0.556
Teacher Preparedness	0.191	0.907	0.669

4.9. Qualitative Analysis

4.9.1. Demographics

Table 9 depicts the demographic analysis of the interview participants. The results depict that among (n the eight) interview participants, 25% were 26-35 years and 36-45 years of age, respectively, and 50% were 46 and above. In terms of gender, 37.5% were males, and 62.5% were females. In addition, 75% of them attended formal training for inclusive education, while 25% did not.

4.10. Themes Table

4.10.1. Teacher Competencies in Inclusive Education

This theme, shown in Table 10, was developed from the interview questions that explored self-perceived competencies, lack of confidence, and capacity to deliver instruction to learners with diversity in inclusive classes among the teachers.

As depicted in Table 10, R1, in response to a question related to this theme, stated:

"I feel confident teaching mixed-ability classes, but when students have specific learning or behavioural needs, I am not always sure how to adapt my teaching effectively."

Table 9. Demographics analysis.

Demographic Category	Option	Frequency (N=8)	Percentage (%)
Age	26-35	2	25%
	36-45	2	25%
	46 and above	4	50%
Gender	Male	3	37.5%
	Female	5	62.5%
Formal Training in Inclusive Education	Yes	6	75%
	No	2	25%

This response demonstrates a distinct difference between overall pedagogical confidence and special inclusive competence. Although there is confidence in teaching heterogeneous classrooms, there is no confidence in special learning or behavioural needs. According to (Adams *et al.*, 2023; and Yaraya *et al.*, 2018), inclusive pedagogy entails having teachers create learning spaces that expect diversity to occur and not in a reactive manner. The uncertainty of R1 implies that preparedness is contingent, which indicates that inclusive competence is not the automatic continuation of general teaching skills but that explicit knowledge of pedagogical competencies is needed.

R4 explained:

"I use strategies like group work and differentiation, but I often question whether these approaches truly support students with additional needs.", as shown in Table 10.

Such a response is a manifestation of procedural involvement, with inclusive practices lacking effective evaluative depth. As (Muñoz-Martínez *et al.*, 2021) stressed, it is not simply the employment of inclusive strategies that makes successful inclusion; the key is the ability of the teachers to evaluate them critically. The uncertainty of R4 implies that inclusive practices are used in a mechanical and not a reflective manner, which makes them ineffective. This supports the argument that training in teaching undermines teacher competence when the methods are taught as more important than the ideas.

Table 10 also depicts that R7 noted:

"Balancing behaviour management and learning in an inclusive classroom is difficult, especially without specialist guidance."

This response portrays competence as a relational concept in which a teacher's ability is influenced by the support structures provided. According to (Muñoz-Martínez *et al.*, 2021), teachers' perceived competence is usually indicative of systemic circumstances, as opposed to individual constraints. According to the response provided by R7, institutional support cannot be separated from competence in inclusion.

Table 10. Themes.

Theme	Respondent Responses	Codes
Teacher Competencies in Inclusive Education	R1: “I feel confident teaching mixed-ability classes, but when students have specific learning or behavioural needs, I am not always sure how to adapt my teaching effectively.”	Pedagogical confidence, differentiation, classroom management
	R4: “I use strategies like group work and differentiation, but I often question whether these approaches truly support students with additional needs.”	
	R7: “Balancing behaviour management and learning in an inclusive classroom is difficult, especially without specialist guidance.”	
Barriers to Effective Inclusion	R2: “Large class sizes make it extremely difficult to provide individual attention to students who need additional support.”	Structural barriers, workload, institutional support
	R5: “Meeting curriculum demands leaves very little time to plan lessons that fully address diverse learning needs.”	
	R8: “There is strong encouragement for inclusion, but limited access to appropriate resources or specialist staff.”	
Training Needs and Support for Teachers	R3: “In my training, inclusion was discussed mainly in theory, with very limited practical experience in real classrooms.”	Theory practice gap, professional support
	R6: “Ongoing support, such as mentoring or collaboration with experienced teachers, would significantly improve my confidence in inclusive teaching.”	

4.10.2. Barriers to Effective Inclusion

This theme was based on enquiries about the issues that would impede the process of implementing inclusive education at both the classroom and institutional levels.

R2 is stated, as depicted in Table 10:

“Large class sizes make it extremely difficult to provide individual attention to students who need additional support.”

This statement of **R2** points to a structural barrier that directly restricts inclusive practice. (Brussino, 2021; and Majoko, 2019) claim that inclusion policies are often not based on classroom realities, which creates more symbolic than substantive inclusion. The practice of **R2** proves the effect of class size through a constraint of differentiation and depriving students of equal learning opportunities, as inclusion is an aspirational concept rather than a working one.

As shown in Table 10, **R5** explained:

“Meeting curriculum demands leaves very little time to plan lessons that fully address diverse learning needs.”

This indicates the work hardening and competing institutional interests of teachers. According to (Zwane & Malale, 2018), accountability pressures lower teachers’ abilities to direct and reflect on pedagogy. The reaction of **R5** demonstrates the marginalisation of inclusion in the competition with performance-based curriculum requirements.

R8 noted:

“There is strong encouragement for inclusion, but limited access to appropriate resources or specialist staff.”

This underscores the lack of connection between policy and action. According to (Arnaiz-Sánchez *et al.*, 2023), inclusion needs to be coordinated with support systems; without the resources, the responsibility will rest on the shoulders of individual teachers, making the process of sustainability and effectiveness fragile.

4.10.3. Training Needs and Support for Teachers

This theme was generated in response to questions that investigated teacher training perceptions and support for inclusive education at the beginning of teaching practice.

Table 10 depicts that **R3** stated:

“In my training, inclusion was discussed mainly in theory, with very limited practical experience in real classrooms.”

This response is indicative of a continuing theory-practice disjunction in teacher education. (Yaraya *et al.*, 2018) asserts that in situational learning, professional competence is developed as opposed to abstract teaching. The theoretical exposure to practical application is an account proposed by **R3** to explain how it impairs the preparedness for inclusive teaching.

R6 explained:

“Ongoing support, such as mentoring or collaboration with experienced teachers, would significantly improve my confidence in inclusive teaching.”

The response of **R6** focuses on the social aspect of professional learning: According to (Majoko, 2019), professional development is most effective in sustaining teacher efficacy compared to single training. **R6** pointed out that readiness for inclusion is built on the basis of constant professional interaction, not only training at first Table 11.

Table 11. Integrated qualitative and quantitative findings.

Quantitative Result	Statistical Evidence	Supporting Qualitative Evidence	Integrated Interpretation
Perceived Barriers → Teacher Preparedness	Significant negative association ($\beta = -0.303$, $p = 0.000$)	Participants reported that large class sizes, limited resources, and lack of specialist support restricted their ability to address diverse learner needs (R2, R8).	The qualitative findings explain that perceived barriers reduce preparedness by limiting teachers' ability to apply inclusive practices despite positive intentions.
Perceived Barriers → Teacher Training Program	Significant negative association ($\beta = -0.501$, $p = 0.000$)	Participants highlighted limited practical exposure and insufficient institutional support within training experiences (R3, R8).	Interview evidence suggests that structural constraints influence how teachers evaluate the adequacy and relevance of training programs for inclusive classrooms.
Teacher Competency → Teacher Preparedness	Significant positive association ($\beta = 0.163$, $p = 0.027$)	Participants expressed confidence in general classroom teaching but uncertainty in adapting instruction for specific learning and behavioural needs (R1, R4).	Qualitative evidence supports that competency contributes to preparedness, but inclusive competence requires specialised knowledge beyond general teaching skills.
Teacher Competency → Teacher Training Program	Significant positive association ($\beta = 0.192$, $p = 0.002$)	Participants indicated that practical strategies, differentiation, and mentoring were necessary to strengthen confidence and competence (R4, R6).	The findings suggest that teachers' competency perceptions are linked with how they recognise the value and adequacy of professional training experiences.
Teacher Need → Teacher Preparedness	Non-significant association ($\beta = 0.131$, $p = 0.062$)	Participants identified needs for additional guidance, resources, and specialist support (R7, R8).	Qualitative findings indicate that recognising professional needs alone does not automatically translate into perceived preparedness without effective support mechanisms.
Teacher Need → Teacher Training Program	Non-significant association ($\beta = 0.068$, $p = 0.233$)	Participants described gaps between theoretical training and practical classroom application (R3).	The findings suggest that perceived needs are not necessarily resolved through existing training exposure, highlighting gaps in training relevance and delivery.
Teacher Training Program → Teacher Preparedness	Significant positive association ($\beta = 0.278$, $p = 0.001$)	Participants stated that mentoring, collaboration, and practical experiences would improve confidence in inclusive teaching (R6).	Qualitative evidence reinforces that meaningful training experiences contribute to greater perceived readiness for inclusive classrooms.

5. DISCUSSION

Another crucial result is that barriers play a major role in influencing teachers' preparation for inclusive classrooms and perceptions of teacher training programs (H1 and H2). Perceived barriers, including lack of resources, high student numbers, and lack of training, obstruct teachers' delivery of effective inclusive education (Savolainen *et al.*, 2022; Pasha & Ijaz, 2021). These impediments do not only pose a problem in the classroom, but they also influence teachers' self-efficacy and confidence, which makes them less equipped to adopt inclusive strategies (Boyle *et al.*, 2022; Zainalabidin & Ma'rof, 2021). Teachers tend to show a positive attitude towards inclusion, but they often encounter numerous difficulties in terms of duration and difficulties in implementing their attitude into practice. These obstacles should be dealt with on a system level, leading to teacher readiness, which involves the adequate provision of resources, lowering class sizes, and training and support that teachers obtain. These barriers can be overcome to develop a more supportive learning environment for teachers and students in inclusive classes. Research has demonstrated that when teachers are provided with the required assistance, they tend to

use inclusive education more successfully (Zainalabidin & Ma'rof, 2021). This is strengthened by qualitative findings, as the participants reported that the high density of classrooms, lack of materials, and inadequate institutional support were among the constraints that affected their self-confidence in implementing inclusive practices. These contextual challenges were also linked to decreased self-efficacy of teachers, which is consistent with (Boyle *et al.*, 2022; Zainalabidin & Ma'rof, 2021), who stress the importance of external circumstances in shaping the level of self-efficacy of teachers. Taken together, the results indicate that barriers impede the delivery of instruction and affect perceptions of readiness to teach and learn inclusively.

The results of H2 agree with Teacher Self-Efficacy Theory which posits that constraints in the environment directly affect teachers' self-efficacy and their perceived preparedness for implementing inclusive practices. Teachers' confidence in their teaching ability is affected by structural issues, including low resources, overcrowded classrooms, and teachers not being trained extensively enough to implement inclusive strategies (Boyle *et al.*, 2022). The results support what (Pasha & Ijaz,

2021; Savolainen *et al.*, 2022) found; that preparedness for inclusive education is not only about the individual competency, but also favourable institutional contexts that enable the teacher's feeling of efficacy beliefs and the confidence of instruction.

The results of the study support H3 and H4 because teacher competencies such as knowledge, skills, and attitudes are important in teacher preparedness towards inclusive classrooms and perceptions of teacher training programmes. With the required competencies, teachers are better placed to handle diverse classrooms and employ inclusive practices efficiently (Boyle *et al.*, 2022; Gyamfi & Yeboah, 2022). However, there is one problematic question: even with formal education on inclusive education, some teachers are still not ready to face the reality of teaching in diverse classrooms. It shows the difference between the theoretical information acquired at the teacher-training stage and the skills to implement this information in practice (Kimhi & Nir, 2025). This is supported by the interviews conducted, as participants indicated that there was a lack of practical experience in the training that affected their confidence, although they possessed theoretical knowledge. The qualitative evidence thus accounts for the findings of the competence-preparedness mismatch found in the data and concludes that classroom experience is crucial in bridging the gap. Overall, these results suggest that competency is important for preparedness, in conjunction with applied training experiences (Kimhi & Nir, 2025). This gap implies that teacher training should be restructured to focus on field-based experiences and practical training, which will help teachers gain confidence and mastery in implementing inclusive education strategies. This approach is supported by Teacher Self-Efficacy Theory, which emphasises the effectiveness of guided practice, mastery experiences, and social feedback in creating teachers' beliefs about their capabilities and directly affecting the preparedness and effectiveness of instruction, as proposed by (Eun, 2023; Grageda *et al.*, 2022).

Hypotheses H5 and H6 were rejected, which means that the needs of teachers are not statistically significantly related to teacher preparedness, or teacher training programmes perceptions. The insignificance of H5 indicates that awareness of teachers' needs does not necessarily result in the perceived preparedness to apply inclusive education, which is the difference between awareness and efficacy, as revealed by (Boyle *et al.*, 2022). Equally, the non-significant relationship of H6 shows that the increased teacher needs do not necessarily imply the perceptions of training programme effectiveness, which means that competence, in itself, cannot influence the subjective evaluation of the programme quality. Qualitative results also support this, with participants noting very clear training and resource needs but indicating a lack of confidence in the implementation of inclusive practices. Teacher competency was positively associated with perceptions of teacher training programs, suggesting that teachers who perceive themselves as more competent evaluate training experiences more positively. Together, these results indicate that levels of preparedness are more dependent upon training experiences and contextual support rather than the need or actual level of competency.

The rejection of H5 and H6 adheres to Bandura's Teacher Self-Efficacy Theory, which stresses the difference between the recognition of needs and learning to be confident in conducting inclusive teaching and learning. Awareness of teacher needs alone was not found to improve perceived teacher preparedness unless coupled with mastery experiences and institutional support (Boyle *et al.*, 2022). In addition, increasing competency does not significantly affect training program effectiveness ratings, indicating that efficacy beliefs are not solely a reflection of teachers' capability to undertake training program tasks, but also of the quality, relevance, and applicability of training in inclusive educational settings.

The results provide a critical time urging that structural and content-based aspects of training, guided practice, and experiential learning are critical in the development of preparedness, unlike personal teacher attributes or perceived requirements. Teacher Self-Efficacy Theory also explains this as the belief that personal abilities and the experience of mastery make one ready, and that latent needs or competency without mastery experiences do not. This reading refutes the presumptions that self-reported needs or competence inherently improve preparedness and the need to have specific, practice-based teacher development.

The results of the present study underline the necessity of changes in teacher preparation programs toward a greater focus on practical exposure, hands-on experience, and proper support for teachers in inclusive settings. Teacher education programs need to be structured in such a way that they not only provide theoretical knowledge related to inclusive education, but also involve practical field-based training so that teachers can interact with diverse classrooms and implement inclusive strategies (Savolainen *et al.*, 2022). In addition, it is important to deal with perceived obstacles, including resource shortages and large classes, to enhance teacher preparedness. Educational policies must ensure that teachers have the resources and tools to carry out inclusive practices. The current study opines that the development of teacher competency should not only focus on skill development but also on a wider contextual element that cannot be overlooked in promoting the capabilities of teachers to develop inclusive learning environments. Teacher training programs should not be limited to improving theoretical knowledge. As (Boyle *et al.*, 2020; and Kimhi & Nir, 2025) state, teacher training programs should equip teachers with the interpersonal and practical skills necessary to succeed in diverse classrooms.

CONCLUSION

The present research shows that teacher readiness to teach in inclusive classrooms is not an individual feature or the direct result of the training delivery, but a bargained result that is influenced by the structural circumstances and professional capacity. Cumulative evidence has shown that despite teachers being equipped with precursor competencies and participating in training programs, readiness is limited in cases where systemic barriers prevail in the teaching environment. The qualitative description of the situation has shown that resource constraints and institutional pressures are eroding the perceived training value, which can explain the high negative relationship

of perceived barriers that was found quantitatively. The low importance of teacher need indicates that knowledge of difficulties cannot be converted into preparation without facilitating conditions. Notably, the results warn against the tendency to assume that the effective expansion of training programmes immediately improves inclusivity; the success of such programmes relies on the compatibility between the training material and the situations in the classroom, and institutional support. Areas of preparation within these empirical limits take the shape of contingent, and not necessarily, universal preparedness by personal effort or policy will.

LIMITATIONS

This study has several limitations. Convenience sampling narrows the scope of generalising the findings to the population under study. The use of self-reported questionnaires introduces response bias as participants exaggerate or downplay their competencies. All variables were measured using self-reported instruments, which depicted the limitations of the research design based on survey data collection and perceptual data. In addition, the use of cross-sectional self-reported data limits the predictive interpretation of the associations between the constructs of the study. Although a coding framework and intercoder review were applied, additional procedures such as member checking and prolonged engagement were not performed. The cross-sectional design can only capture one point in time, thus not being able to draw predictive relationships among teacher preparedness, training, and barriers to inclusion. In addition, contextual influences in various teacher education programmes have not been examined exhaustively, which impacted the completeness of the findings.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The findings indicate that policies regarding education need to focus on incorporating practical and hands-on field experiences in teacher training programmes to equip future teachers for inclusive classes. Policymakers should provide teachers with sufficient exposure to various classroom environments to enable them to acquire the skills, knowledge, and confidence to effectively apply inclusive practices in the classroom. Moreover, the resource coverage of inclusive education must be greatly increased to meet the practical challenges encountered by teachers which include the absence of support materials, high classrooms, and low chances of professional development.

FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

More longitudinal research, which will trace the effect of inclusive education training on teacher effectiveness in a diverse classroom (long-term), should be considered in the future to provide a better understanding of how teacher preparedness changes over time. Moreover, research may be conducted to study the particular issues and obstacles that teachers encounter in various cultural, social, and geographic settings to make teacher training more effective. Lastly, studies that highlight the importance of continuous professional growth, mentorship, and continuous training in promoting

teacher preparedness for inclusion in the long term would prove invaluable in preparing teachers to deal with the challenges of inclusive education across the lifetime of their careers.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CFA	=	Confirmatory Factor Analysis
CMV	=	Common Method Variance
EFA	=	Exploratory Factor Analysis
PLS-SEM	=	Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

S.A. conceived and designed the study, acquired and preprocessed the dataset, conducted the statistical analyses and, interpreted the findings, developed the proposed framework, drafted and critically revised the manuscript, and approved the final version for publication.

ETHICAL APPROVAL & INFORMED CONSENT

Ethical principles were followed throughout the study to protect the rights, confidentiality, and well-being of all participants. Formal ethical approval was not required in accordance with the applicable institutional requirements. Informed consent was obtained from each participant before data collection. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, their right to withdraw at any stage without consequence, and the use of audio recordings for research purposes. All interviews were conducted with the participants' consent, and the collected data were treated confidentially and used solely for research purposes.

AVAILABILITY OF DATA AND MATERIALS

The data supporting the findings of this study are not publicly available due to confidentiality and privacy considerations, as they contain information obtained from individual interviews with participants. De-identified data may be made available by the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest.

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DECLARATION OF AI

During the preparation of this manuscript, the author used ChatGPT solely for language editing and refinement. All AI-assisted content was carefully reviewed, verified, and approved

by the author, who accepts full responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, and final content of the manuscript.

APPENDIX

Questionnaire for Teacher Preparedness for Inclusive Classrooms

This questionnaire is designed to evaluate teacher preparedness for inclusive classrooms by assessing teacher competencies, training needs, and the barriers they face during initial teacher training. It is divided into two sections: Section A focuses on demographic information, while Section B addresses the competencies, challenges, and barriers related to inclusive education. The responses will be analyzed using statistical methods such as Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA).

Appendix A: Demographic Information

(Please mark with an 'X' or fill in the relevant information)

1. Age

- ☐ 18-25
- ☐ 26-35
- ☐ 36-45
- ☐ 46 and above

2. Gender

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Other
- ☐ Prefer not to answer

3. Current Educational Level

- ☐ Bachelor's Degree
- ☐ Master's Degree
- ☐ Doctorate Degree

4. Years of Teaching Experience:

- ☐ 0-2 years
- ☐ 3-5 years
- ☐ 6-10 years
- ☐ 10+ years

5. Have you received any formal training in inclusive education?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Appendix B: Teacher Competencies, Training Needs, and Barriers

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements using the 5-point Likert scale.

1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree.

1	I feel confident in my ability to implement inclusive teaching strategies.	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	☐ 5
2	I have the necessary knowledge to adapt my lessons for students with special educational needs.	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	☐ 5
3	I am confident in managing diverse classrooms with varying student abilities.	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	☐ 5
4	I can collaborate effectively with special education teachers to support inclusive education but feel hindrances.	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	☐ 5
5	I feel confident in creating individualised education plans (IEPs) for students with special educational needs but this needs additional efforts.	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	☐ 5
6	I am able to assess the learning progress of students with diverse needs effectively but its tedious.	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	☐ 5
7	I believe that inclusive education benefits all students, not just those with special educational needs.	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	☐ 5
8	I am capable of using a variety of teaching strategies to support students with different learning styles.	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	☐ 5
9	I am prepared to integrate assistive technologies into my lessons for students with disabilities.	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	☐ 5
10	I feel that my classroom management skills are adequate for maintaining an inclusive learning environment.	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	☐ 5
11	I believe that collaborative teaching with special education teachers improves the learning outcomes for students.	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	☐ 5
12	I have the skills to provide social-emotional support for students with diverse learning needs.	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	☐ 5
13	I am confident in my ability to modify assessments to accommodate the needs of students with disabilities.	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	☐ 5
14	I can create an inclusive classroom environment where all students feel valued and respected.	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	☐ 5
15	I have access to enough resources to support the academic success of students with special educational needs.	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	☐ 5

Appendix C- Open-ended Questions

- How do you assess your current competencies and confidence in teaching students with diverse learning needs in an inclusive classroom?
- What inclusive teaching strategies or practices do you regularly use to support students with different abilities and learning styles?
- What challenges do you face in implementing inclusive education in your classroom? (Please describe briefly.)
- What institutional, resource-related, or classroom-level factors hinder the effective implementation of inclusive practices?
- What aspects of your initial teacher training adequately prepared you for inclusive education, and which areas were insufficient?
- What additional support or training would help you to feel more prepared for teaching in an inclusive classroom? (Please describe briefly.)

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