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

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Abstract:

Inclusive education is a worldwide approach that targets to incorporate students with varying learning requirements to general education classrooms. However, a number of educators do not have sufficient training to provide inclusive practices. The study evaluated teacher preparedness for inclusive classrooms focus in competencies training needs and barriers faced by teachers. It utilised mixed methods which involved the use of a questionnaire of 395 teachers and semi-structured interviews with 8 participants who were pre-service teachers of a primary education. EFA and CFA were used to analyse the data. The findings indicated that 66.7% of the respondents had formal training in inclusive education yet only 41.7% of those were confident about their ability to handle diverse classrooms. The EFA showed that the perceived barriers had a significant but negative relationship with teacher preparedness (-β = 0.303, p = 0.000). In addition, the findings also indicates that direct relationship of the Perceived Barriers with Teacher Preparedness is negative and significant (β = -0.303, p = 0.000). The Teacher Training Program is also significantly associated with Perceived Barriers (β = -0.501, p = 0.000). Teacher Competency also holds positive and significant predictive relationship with Teacher Preparedness (β = 0.163, p = 0.027). Association of Teacher Competency with Teacher Training Program is positive (β = 0.192, p = 0.002). Teacher Need positively but statistically insignificantly related with Teacher Preparedness (β = 0.131, p = 0.062). The results also indicated positive and significant association of Teacher Training Program with Teacher Preparedness (β = 0.278, p = 0.001). Also, the results revealed statistically insignificant relationship of Teacher Need with Teacher Training Program (β = 0.068, p = 0.233). Qualitative data showed challenges that included lack of resources, lack of training and a variety of student numbers in classes. Teacher training programs that addressed the lack of integration between theory and practice in order to equip teachers with inclusive classrooms are highlighted in the study. The results indicated that teacher training programs must have more practical field-based experiences to equip teachers better to work in inclusive classrooms. The policymakers should incorporate exposure in the teacher curriculum, overcome obstacles such as lack of resources and enhance the 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 tackles the issue of education 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 issue of the implementation of these practices in training teachers has not been consistent. This issue is even more alarming in that the preparedness of teachers to implement these practices in education is the cornerstone for the achievements of the concept (Gyamfi & Yeboah, 2022). This view is verified through the assertions made by Sharma and Gill (2024) that the core of the issue of inclusive education is the extent to which students with diverse education needs have access to education with the aim of attaining high learning standards in an atmosphere where the phenomenon of 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

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able to adapt their teaching practices to accommodate the whole range of classroom education (Butakor et al., 2020; Boyle et al., 2022). On the issue of the preparedness of teachers in the training process initiated through the education system with the view to ensuring that they implement the issue of the concept in the future, the assertions made by Kimhi and 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 by this study although the policy of inclusive education is generally supported. Although inclusion of students with different learning requirements into general education classrooms is accepted as a strategy in enhancing equitable learning and social inclusion around the world (Ainscow, 2020; Sharma & Gill, 2024), teacher training programs do not always provide a proper preparation of teachers to meet the challenge. Research revealed that inclusive education is not taught in the core curriculum of most teacher training programs (Kimhi & Nir, 2025), which teachers are ill equipped to handle a classroom with a diverse group of learners. Although the training of teachers to provide inclusive education is not left out, the gap between theory and practice is typically very high (Savolainen et al., 2022). Teachers often express the positive attitude to inclusion yet do not have the practical skills to resolve the effective inclusion strategies (Boyle et al., 2022; Ismailos et al., 2022). Moreover, high levels of resources, big classes, and weak support systems contribute to them as systemic obstacles (Pasha & Ijaz, 2021). This unpreparedness compromises effective inclusion education and influences quality of teaching to the pupils with special educational needs.

This study applies Teacher Self-Efficacy Theory, as the sensitising framework that Bandura (1997) developed to help elucidate the findings, and not applied as a detailed explanatory or measurement-based theory. The theory is applied to conceptually explain the interconnection between the beliefs of the teachers about their potential and their readiness to engage in inclusive education in certain institutional and contextual circumstances. According to previous studies, such as Bhati and Sethy, (2022); Gordon et al., (2023) self-efficacy is a valuable perspective to explain the interaction of personal abilities, professional experiences, and environmental limitations to determine how such factors influence teachers perceived practise readiness. Teacher competency in this study is comprehended as an origin of efficacy beliefs and is operationalised in self-reported confidence and a perceived mastery of inclusive strategies, which are in line with the statement by Bandura that such beliefs mediate effort and persistence in the face of professional challenges suggested by Lazarides and Warner (2020) also.

The conceptualisation of teacher preparedness is the perceived preparedness, not the actual instructional performance, because perception of readiness is subjective. The perceived barriers are addressed as environmental restrictions that inform the confidence of teachers and restrict the implementation of inclusive practises in line with the evidence that situational factors can sabotage the 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 by means of guided practise and feedback does not presuppose homogenous or automatic effects. Although the needs of teachers are also taken into consideration, 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 in putting Self-Efficacy Theory into this perspective, interpretive role that serves to avoid over-theorisation and keep theory and constructs in line with empirical evidence positions theory in a contextualising role and not in a prescriptive role when making measurement or predictive relationships assertions.

Despite the commitments and aims of global policies, many training programs for teachers are not preparing teachers sufficiently enough to meet the demands of inclusive education in the classroom (Pasha & Ijaz, 2021). While there is a positive attitude held by most teachers toward inclusive education, there has been an imbalance between the theory and practice in many cases, and there is a need for training and experience in special education, and assistance infrastructure in place (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 crucially 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 programs that are not well equipped to prepare teachers for inclusive classrooms. Scarparolo and Subban (2021), pointed that, out large discrepancies in the attitudes, self-efficacy, and practical preparedness of teachers, with a special emphasis on their competency in managing classrooms of diversity. Thus, teachers often graduate with limited exposure to strategies of inclusive teaching and practical field experiences, hindering the translation of theoretical knowledge into effective classroom practice (Resch & Schrittesser 2023). Furthermore, there is also a lack of research that shed light on quantitative measures, such as competencies and training exposure, with qualitative insights on the lived experiences of teachers and contextual barriers. This study, therefore, assesses teacher competencies, identifies training needs, and explores contextual factors affecting teacher preparedness for inclusive education and adds to contextual evidence that enhances teacher education programs and promotes inclusive education.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1. Research Design

The present study used a cross-sectional design in order to assess teacher preparedness for inclusive classrooms. As per Hunziker and 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. For the assessment of teacher preparedness, the present study employed a combination of Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). These techniques are much more viable since 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.

2.2. 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, as depicted in (Appendix B). The critical objective of the research design was to fully understand the competencies which teachers thought they possessed and the gaps that they feel current teacher training programs possess. Subsequent to the EFA, the confirmation exercise was conducted using CFA 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 identified constructs, such as competencies in inclusive teaching and perceived barriers, represent the underlying dimensions in 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 which teacher preparedness and perceived barriers have on classroom preparedness for inclusion.

A structured questionnaire, addressing this challenge, has been designed and administered in both online and paper/pencil formats to teachers studying in teacher education programs. This questionnaire consisted of Likert-scale items (Appendix B) intended to capture various dimensions of teacher preparedness on their competencies in inclusive teaching, training adequacy, and challenges perceived by them in implementing inclusive practices. There were two key components of the survey-one relating to demographic information of the respondents such as age, gender, and teaching experience; the other, relating to self-assessment of teachers regarding their preparedness for inclusive education. The items were specifically framed to capture teachers' confidence, perceived barriers to inclusion, and the adequacy of their initial teacher training programs.

In the current study, teacher competency is operationalised as self-reported skills and knowledge associated to practices of inclusive teaching. In addition, teacher training program denotes to reported exposure of the participants with components of formal training, coursework, and professional development activities associated to inclusive education. Lastly, Teacher preparedness is described as self-perceived readiness to apply and adopt inclusive practices, instead of observed or objectively measured teaching effectiveness.

Using structured survey questionnaire, survey was conducted with 395 pre-service teachers in the teacher education programs, served primary education. The survey was sent out via the online and paper/pen methods to make it as accessible as possible. Convenience sampling was also used in selecting the sample because it enabled the inclusion of easily available participants that were undergoing teacher training, either. This method was feasible considering time and resource limitations because it was possible to collect data on the participants who were readily accessible and willing to take part in the study (Hair et al., 2017). The convenience sampling has been applied in educational research when particular groups are being targeted as well as it offers the direct way in which data is collected using the directly involved people in the area under study. Even though this sampling can reduce the potential to generalise, it can be used in studies that are exploratory in nature, i.e., the main goal is to obtain information about a given but easily accessible population. The respondents were requested to give demographic information including the age, gender, the professional experience of teaching, and the self-report of the readiness to inclusive teaching. As suggested by Fuller et al. (2016) Harman 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. Also, the procedures such as anonymous responses and care in the wording of the items were used to limit the possible effects of methods in order to make sure that the relationships considered among teacher competency, perceived barriers, training exposure, and preparedness are based on construct-level relationships and not on artefacts of measurement.

Moreover, a sample of 8 semi-structured interviews with a heterogeneous population of pre-service teachers was carried out. The interviews were conducted using unstructured and open-ended questionnaire, 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 around 50 minutes as participants were asked about the challenges that they encounter, what training they underwent and how they can 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 and every 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 that the teachers have and about the contextual variables that affect their willingness to engage in inclusive education.

2.3. Data Analysis

The data was divided into two components In order to improve the strength of the research and reduce the impact of bias. In order to enhance the study and minimise the bias, the overall sample (N = 395) was broken down 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. The rest of the sample (60%) that is (n=237) formed Dataset B and was utilised in Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) to validate the factor structure and allows to analyse the relationship of independent constructs with dependent constructs. The allocation of the participants to the two data sets was done through a computer-generated randomization procedure to be able 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 sub-sample 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, 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. Illustratively, the qualitative findings were employed to contextualise and enhance the survey findings, as opposed to creating new theory. The responses obtained during the interview were transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis as the method of Braun and Clarke as suggested by Byrne (2022), which allowed highlighting the patterns that could be applied to teacher competencies, perceived barriers, and the training requirements in inclusive education.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Demographics

As per Table 1, the demographic profile of the 395 participants showed that 28% are males, 29% are females, 5% reported others, and 8% preferred not answer. Regarding the age demographics, most participants are of the age group between 26 and 35 years (28%), 18-25 years (29%). 36-45 (20%) age brackets (21.7%) and 46 and above (23%). In terms of education qualification, most of the respondents are holding a Bachelor degree (34%), (53%) had a Master degree, and (13%) had a Doctorate degree. The distribution provided an insight into the educational background of the participants and this is relevant in interpreting the views of the individuals concerning teacher preparedness. The table also shows in teaching experience between the respondents. A considerable percentage (29%) of them were held 3-5 years of teaching experience, (24%) 6-10 years and (34%) held 10+ years of teaching experience. On the other hand, 63% of the participants agreed to have been attended formal teaching 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%
Years of Teaching Experience	0-2 years	50	13%
	3-5 years	115	29%
	6-10 years	95	24%
	10+ years	135	34%
Formal Training in Inclusive Education	Yes	250	63%
	No	145	37%

3.2. Exploratory Factor Analysis

3.2.1. KMO and Bartlett's Test

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

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 nearer KMO values are to 1, the better the data is correlated and the fact that the factor analysis may yield significant results (Shrestha, 2021). Having a value that is far above the 0.6 level, the KMO score indicates that the relationships between variables are great enough to facilitate the determination of underlying factors (Zhang et al., 2024). Further, the Test of Sphericity by Bartlett gave another evidence that the data was suitable to be included 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 in order to discover meaningful patterns. The level of significance (p-value < 0.05) indicates that the data is not random and relationships observed are not artificial which supports the validity of extracting 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 the Bartlett test are complimentary to each other and the data will be suitable to be subjected to factor analysis so that accurate and interpretable factors can be retrieved that would lead to significant results.

3.2.2. Rotated component matrix

Table 3 of the Rotated Component Matrix shows that the items are shows high factor loading clearly and Factor 1 is dominated by Q13, Q14, and Q15, and Factor 2 is dominated by Q1, Q2, and Q3. Questions, Q6, Q7, Q8, and Q12 have more than one high loading and thus a partial overlap between constructs and low distinctiveness. Factors 4 and 5 have eigenvalues less than 1 and it adds little to the cumulative variance, but they are still retained in the study since they are theoretically important and they have high loadings. These patterns are indicative of intrinsic constraints in measurement clarity and affirmation that most of the items measure meaningful dimensions. Hence, the EFA captures interpretable constructs of teacher competencies, perceived barriers, and training adequacy, which provides it a strong basis to perform further confirmatory analysis, but also clearly indicates that some of the items have cross-loading and low factor strength.

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

3.2.3. Total Variance

Table 4 presents the Total Variance Explained, which indicates the contribution each of the components makes to the total variance in the data. The former has the highest percentage of variance of 45.871% indicating it is the most dominant in explaining the structure of data. The second and the third components account 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 Exploratory Factor Analysis has led development following hypotheses of the study 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

Hypotheses

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

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

H3: Teacher competency has a statistically significant relationship with teacher preparedness for inclusive classrooms.

H4: Teacher competency has a statistically significant relationship with perceptions of teacher training programs.

H5: Teacher needs have a statistically significant association with teacher preparedness for inclusive classrooms.

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

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

3.3 Confirmatory Factor Analysis

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

3.3.1 Measurement model using confirmatory factor analysis

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			

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 values of Cronbach alpha (0.812 to 0.893) are above the established cutoff (0.7), which proves 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 have factor loadings that are greater than 0.8 indicating that each item is an effective measure of its construct. The values of AVE 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 are 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 it easily notifies that there are overlapping patterns in certain items. This background assists in the further structural analysis and elucidation of predictive associations between the research variables.

Table 6 shows the discriminant validity of the constructs, determined using the values of HTMT ratio against 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 HTMT ratio of (0.720<0.85) which means no conceptual overlapping, but distinctiveness among variables. In the same way, Teacher Competency and Teacher Need (0.626), and Teacher Need and Teacher Preparedness (0.352), also depicts no conceptual overlapping and that variables are separated from each other. Similarly, this is case amid all the constructs in the measurement model. The results validates that the constructs of this research are properly differentiated indicating no overlapping.

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
Perceived Barriers -> Teacher Preparedness	-0.303	3.760	0.000
Perceived Barriers -> Teacher Training Program	-0.501	8.670	0.000
Teacher Competency -> Teacher Preparedness	0.163	2.212	0.027
Teacher Competency -> Teacher Training Program	0.192	3.133	0.002
Teacher Need -> Teacher Preparedness	`0.131	1.864	0.062
Teacher Need -> Teacher Training Program	0.068	1.193	0.233
Teacher Training Program -> Teacher Preparedness	0.278	3.179	0.001

3.3.2. Path Analysis

The path analysis results, presented at Table 7, indicate the strong predictive relationship among constructs that were used in the current study. The direct relationship of the Perceived Barriers with Teacher Preparedness is negative and significant ($\beta = -0.303$, $p = 0.000$) which is an indication that an increase in perceived barriers in the learning environment is associated with a decreased 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 negatively affect the education system have a significant negative relationship with the effectiveness of training programs. On the other hand, Teacher Competency also holds positive and significant predictive relationship with Teacher Preparedness ($\beta = 0.163$, $p = 0.027$). The association of Teacher Competency with Teacher Training Program is

positive (β = 0.192, p = 0.002) indicating that more competent teachers have high chances of attending quality training programs. Additionally, Teacher Need positively but statistically insignificantly related with Teacher Preparedness (β = 0.131, p = 0.062), which led to rejection of H5. Moreover, there is a positive and significant association of Teacher Training Program with Teacher Preparedness (β = 0.278, p = 0.001), which ascertained that the designed training program substantially enhances the readiness of teachers in inclusive classrooms. Lastly, the results also revealed statistically insignificant relationship of Teacher Need with Teacher Training Program (β = 0.068, p = 0.233)., which led to rejection of H6.

3.4. Qualitative Analysis

3.4.1. Demographics

Table 8 depicts demographics analysis of the interview participants of the study. The results depict, among (n=8) 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. Furthermore, 12.5% of the interviewed participants held 3-5 years of teaching experience, 50% with 6-10 years of experience and 37.5% were 10+ years of experience. Also, 75% of them attended formal training for inclusive education, and 25% did not.

3.4.2 Themes Table

3.4.3 Teacher Competencies in Inclusive Education

This theme, Table 9 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 amongst the teachers.

As depicted in in Table 9, 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."

This response demonstrates a distinct difference between the overall pedagogical confidence and the special inclusive competence. Although there is confidence in teaching heterogeneous classrooms, there is not confidence in special needs of learning or behavioural needs. According to Adams et al. (2023); Yaraya et al. (2018) inclusive pedagogy entails having teachers create learning spaces, which expect diversity to occur and not in a reactive manner. The uncertainty of R1 implies that the preparedness is contingent, which makes the point that inclusive competence is not the automatic continuation of the general teaching skills but that explicit knowledge on 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 9.

Such response is a manifestation of procedural involvement with inclusive practises lacking effective evaluative depth. As it is stressed by Muñoz-Martínez et al. (2021) 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 practises are used in a mechanical and not a reflective manner, which makes them ineffective. This supports arguments that training in teaching undermines teacher competence when the methods are taught as more important than the ideas.

Table 9, also depicts that R7 noted:

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

Table 8 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%
Years of Teaching Experience	3-5 years	1	12.5%
	6-10 years	4	50.0%
	10+ years	3	37.5%
Formal Training in Inclusive Education	Yes	6	75%
	No	2	25%

Table 9. 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."	

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

3.4.4 Barriers to Effective Inclusion

This theme was based on inquiries about the issues that would impede the process of implementing inclusive education in both classroom and institutional level.

R2 stated, as depicted in Table 9:

"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 restricts the inclusive practise directly. Brussino (2021); Majoko (2019) claims that inclusion policies are often not based on classroom realities, which creates more symbolic than substantive inclusion. The practise 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 instead of a working one.

As, shown in Table 9, R5 explained:

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

This is an indication of the work hardening and competing institutional interests of the teachers. According to Zwane and Malale (2018) accountability pressures lower the abilities of teachers to pedagogy direction and reflection. 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 talk and action. According to Arnaiz-Sánchez et al. (2023) inclusion needs to be coordinated with systems of support, since without the resources, the responsibility will rest on the shoulders of individual teachers, making the process of sustainability and effectiveness fragile.

3.4.5 Training Needs and Support for Teachers

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

Table 9 depicts that, R3 stated:

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

The response is indicative of a continuing theory-practise 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 impair the preparedness to 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. The statement of R6 points out that readiness to inclusion is built on the basis of constant professional interaction, not only the training at first.

4. DISCUSSION

The results of the study support H1 because teacher competencies such as knowledge, skills and attitudes are very important in teacher preparedness towards inclusive classrooms. With the required competencies, teachers are better placed to handle the diverse classrooms and employ the inclusive practices efficiently (Boyle et al., 2022; Gyamfi & Yeboah, 2022). However, there is one problematic question that even with the 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 gap implies that teacher training should be restructured to focus on field-based experiences and practical training, which will make teachers gain confidence and mastery of implementing the strategy of inclusive education. This approach is supported by Teacher Self-Efficacy Theory, which emphasises the effectiveness of guided practise, mastery experiences, and social feedback in creating the belief of teachers about their capabilities and directly affecting preparedness and effectiveness of instruction proposed by Eun (2023); Grageda et al. (2022) and others.

The other crucial result is that barriers play a major role in influencing teachers to prepare inclusive classroom (H2). The perceived barriers, including lack of resources, high student numbers, and lack of training, obstruct the delivery of effective inclusive education by teachers (Savolainen et al., 2022; Pasha & Ijaz, 2021). These impediments do not only pose a problem in the classroom, but they also have an influence on the self-efficacy and confidence of the teachers, which makes them less equipped to adopt inclusive strategies (Boyle et al., 2022; Zainalabidin & Ma'rof, 2021). The 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 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 by teachers and students in inclusive classes. It has always been demonstrated by the research that when the teachers are provided with the required assistance, they tend to use the inclusive education more successfully (Zainalabidin & Ma'rof, 2021).

Teacher training programs are also important in increasing teacher readiness to work in inclusive classrooms (H3, H4, H5). Results reveal that teacher training programs particularly the programs providing access to inclusive classrooms are important determinants of readiness among teachers (0.278, 0.001). Nevertheless, it is observed that even in spite of the known significance of training, there is a gap between theory and practice in teacher education programs, as the majority of teachers note the lack of practical experience (Pasha & Ijaz, 2021; Kimhi & Nir, 2025). 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 the H5 indicates that the awareness of the needs of teachers does not necessarily result in the perceived preparedness to apply inclusive education, which is the difference between awareness and efficacy revealed by Boyle et al. (2022) as well. Equally, the non-significant relationship of H6 shows that the increased teacher competency does not necessarily imply the perceptions of training programme effectiveness, which means that competence, in itself, cannot influence the subjective evaluation of the programme quality. The results provide a critical time urging that structural and content-based aspects of training, guided practise and experiential learning are critical in the development of preparedness unlike personal teacher attributes or perceived requirements. These results can be explained through the Teacher Self-Efficacy Theory as the belief in personal abilities and the experience of mastery make readiness, and latent needs or competency without mastery experiences do not. This reading refutes presumptions that self-reported needs or competence inherently improve preparedness and the need to have specific, practise based, teacher development.

The results of the present study underline the necessity of the changes in the teacher preparation programs toward a greater focus on the practical exposure, hands-on experience, and proper support of the teachers in the inclusive settings. The teacher education programs need to be structured in such a way that they not only provide theoretical knowledge related to inclusive education but also should involve practical field-based training so that teachers could interact with diverse classrooms and implement the strategies of inclusive nature (Savolainen et al., 2022). In addition, it is important to deal with perceived obstacles, including resource shortage and big classes to enhance teacher preparedness. The educational policies must make sure that the teachers have the resources and tools to carry out the inclusive practice. The current paper

opines that the development of teacher competency does not only focus on skill development but 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 and Nir (2025) state, teacher training programs should also equip the teacher with the interpersonal and practical skills necessary to succeed in diverse classrooms.

CONCLUSION

The present research shows that the teacher readiness to 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. The cumulative evidences have shown that despite the teacher being equipped with precursor competencies and participating in training programmes, readiness is limited in cases where systemic barriers prevail in the teaching environment. The qualitative description of the situation has shown that the 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 the knowledge of difficulties is not able to be converted into preparation without facilitating conditions. Notably, the results warn against the tendency to assume effective expansion of training programmes immediately improve inclusivity; the success of such programmes relies on the compatibility between the training material and the situations in the classroom, and the institutional support. Areas of preparation within these empirical limits take the shape of contingent, and not necessarily, universally, preparedness by personal effort or policy will.

LIMITATIONS

The research is limited in a number of ways. Convenience sampling narrows the scope of generalising the findings to the population under the study. The use of self-reported questionnaires brings in the bias of the response as the participants exaggerate or downplay their competencies. All the variables were measured by using self-reported instruments, which depicted an identified limitations of the research design based on survey data collection and depending on perceptual data. In addition, the utilisation of cross-sectional self-reported data limits predictive interpretation of the associations amid constructs of the study. The semi-structured interviews were not rigorous with a coding protocol and other procedures like member checking that minimises the credibility and reliability of qualitative results. The cross-sectional design can only capture one point on a specific time thus not able to draw predictive relationships among teacher preparedness, training and barriers to inclusion. Also, contextual influences in various teacher education programmes had not been examined exhaustively and this impacted the completeness of findings.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Findings indicate that policies regarding education need to focus on incorporation of practical and hands-on field experiences in teacher training programs in order to equip future teachers in inclusive classes. Teachers should be provided with sufficient exposure to the various classroom environments by policymakers to enable them acquire 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 the teachers which include 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 give a better understanding of how teacher preparedness changes with time. Moreover, research may be conducted in terms of studying the particular issues and obstacles that teachers encounter in various cultural, social, and geographic settings to make teacher training more effective. Lastly, the study that highlights the importance of continuous professional growth, mentorship, and continuous training in promoting teacher preparedness to inclusion in the long term would prove invaluable in preparing teachers to deal with the challenges of inclusive education across the lifetime of their career.

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 provided:
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 individualized 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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