Research Article

Teachers' Attitudes towards Inclusive Education at the Preparatory Stage under the National Education Policy 2020: Evidence from Indian Schools

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Abstract

Teachers' attitudes and readiness to meet students' varied learning needs are critical to the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020's successful implementation of inclusive education. The goal of the current study was to compare teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education according to gender, type of school and level of professional training throughout the preparatory stage (Grades 3–5). Cluster sampling was used to gather data from 128 teachers employed in 32 government and private schools in the Rampur District of Uttar Pradesh using a quantitative survey approach. Data was gathered using a questionnaire created by the researcher that included 30 items on a five-point Likert scale covering six variables. Expert examination validated the instrument's content validity and it showed good internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = 0.82). For data analysis, independent samples t-tests and descriptive statistics were used. According to the results, most teachers had favorable attitudes on inclusive education under NEP 2020. The views of male and female teachers did not differ statistically significantly. However, professionally trained teachers showed noticeably more positive attitude than untrained teachers and government school teachers showed noticeably more favorable attitude than private school teachers. The study emphasizes how important professional development and teacher preparation are to advancing inclusive teaching methods. The results have significant ramifications for legislators, teacher educators and school administrators in bolstering inclusive education programs and guaranteeing the successful execution of NEP 2020 during the planning phase.

Keywords: Inclusive Education, National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020), Teachers' Attitudes, Preparatory Stage, Government and Private Schools

1. Introduction

Inclusive education has emerged as a top priority in modern educational policy because it aims to guarantee fair access, meaningful participation and suitable learning opportunities for all students, regardless of disability, gender, socioeconomic status, language, culture, geography or other forms of diversity. The placement of children with impairments in regular classrooms is only one aspect of the modern definition of inclusion. Educational systems must find and remove obstacles that limit students' access, engagement, success and feeling of community. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) highlights that education systems respond to learner diversity and address the circumstances that lead to exclusion through an ongoing process of inclusion [1]. Changes in school culture, curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, institutional procedures and support systems are therefore necessary for inclusive education.

Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which calls for inclusive and equitable quality education and opportunities for lifelong learning for all, is strongly linked to the global commitment to inclusive and equitable quality education [2]. Many students still face exclusion due to disability, poverty, socioeconomic disadvantage, language, gender, geographic isolation and unequal access to educational resources, despite significant policy advancements. According to the UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report, educational inclusion necessitates sufficient funding, easily accessible infrastructure, qualified educators, suitable educational resources, encouraging leadership and efficient accountability systems in addition to policy declarations [1]. Therefore, the ability of schools and instructors to address a variety of learning requirements in regular classrooms is a prerequisite for implementing inclusive education.

In order to successfully implement inclusive education, teachers play a crucial role. They offer chances for engagement, plan classroom activities, choose instructional tactics, evaluate student achievement and interpret policy provisions. Teachers' attitudes affect their readiness to engage with parents and experts, modify teaching methods, tolerate learner variety and offer suitable assistance to students who face participation obstacles. While negative or ambiguous attitudes may hinder the successful use of inclusive approaches, positive attitudes may encourage flexible teaching, equitable participation and supportive classroom connections. Teachers' views continue to be a key determinant of how inclusive classroom settings are and how prepared they are to interact with diverse student groups, according to recent research [3].

International study indicates that although teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education are usually positive, they differ depending on their professional competence, self-efficacy, training, teaching experience, institutional support and educational

situation. Teachers' attitude toward inclusive education were generally positive and have improved between 2000 and 2020, according to a meta-analysis encompassing 40,512 pre-service and in-service teachers from 55 countries [4]. Positive attitudes, however, do not always mean that educators feel sufficiently equipped to use inclusive approaches. Concerns about big class numbers, scarce resources, inadequate expert assistance, inadequate training and the practical demands of meeting the needs of diverse learners may cause teachers to promote inclusion as an educational philosophy.

Teacher self-efficacy is especially pertinent to inclusive education because it affects teachers' confidence in modifying curriculum, overseeing diverse classes, assisting individual students and putting inclusive pedagogies into practice. A meta-analysis that looked at the relationship between instructors' attitudes and self-efficacy found that both dimensions were positively correlated in a variety of cultural and educational situations [5]. Teachers are more likely to exhibit positive attitudes and actively participate in inclusive practices if they feel they have the knowledge and abilities necessary to handle learner diversity. Therefore, transforming positive ideas into successful classroom behavior requires teacher preparation and ongoing professional development.

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 in India offers a crucial framework for promoting inclusion and equity at all educational levels. The policy acknowledges that all students should have access to educational opportunities, especially children from socioeconomically poor backgrounds and children with impairments. Equitable access, learner-centered education, adaptable curriculum routes, suitable support systems and the creation of an educational system sensitive to a range of learning needs are all highlighted in NEP 2020 [6]. Additionally, the policy highlights the importance of high-quality teacher education, ongoing professional development & enhanced institutional support and it identifies teachers as important contributors to educational reform.

The 5+3+3+4 curriculum and pedagogical framework is used in the projected school education system under NEP 2020. The Preparatory stage, which covers Grades 3 to 5, is a crucial era in Children's academic growth. The stage progressively introduces subject-based learning while emphasizing interactive, experiential, activity-based and discovery-oriented learning [6]. These pedagogical goals are intimately linked with inclusive education because students at this stage exhibit significant variance in language development, cognitive capacities, social experiences, learning speed, interests and educational support needs. As a result, Teachers must employ adaptable teaching strategies and provide classrooms where all students can participate meaningfully.

The preparatory stage is especially crucial because learning experiences in Grades 3 to 5 impact children's fundamental academic development, classroom engagement, self-confidence and transition to later stages of schooling. At this point, teachers must acknowledge the diversity of learners, detect educational obstacles, modify their pedagogical approaches, employ suitable evaluation techniques and offer assistance without marginalizing or stigmatizing students. Their views on inclusion may have an impact on how well students participate in class and how much NEP 2020's tenets are incorporated into regular teaching procedures.

According to a recent review of NEP 2020, the policy's emphasis on access, participation, relevance and educational excellence integrates inclusion and equity [7]. However, the implementation of these goals is contingent upon the school-level setting. Teachers' preparedness to implement inclusion may be impacted by variations in institutional resources, administrative support, teacher qualifications, professional development opportunities and exposure to inclusive methods. A progressive policy framework does not guarantee consistent application in both public and private educational institutions. Teachers' experiences and attitudes toward inclusive education may be shaped by institutional disparities.

Positive attitudes and practical competence are anticipated to be greatly influenced by professional training. Teachers who receive systematic training in inclusive education may exhibit more awareness of the diversity of learners, higher confidence in their ability to modify instruction and a greater desire to assist students with a range of educational needs. Additionally, training can improve instructors' comprehension of classroom management, flexible assessment, differentiated instruction, collaborative learning and the utilization of suitable support services. On the other hand, even if they agree with the fundamental ideas of inclusive pedagogy, educators who have not had much experience with it may be unsure about how to put it into practice.

Gender continues to have a less consistent impact on teachers' attitude. While some studies have revealed little variations between male and female teachers, others have discovered that professional factors-like training and self-efficacy had a greater impact than demographics [4,5]. Therefore, a more thorough understanding of the elements linked to teachers' attitudes may be obtained by looking at gender in addition to school type and professional training.

While research on inclusive education has grown in India, there is little empirical data on teachers' perspectives, particularly when it comes to the NEP 2020 framework's preparatory stage. Numerous studies that are now available look at inclusive education at the general school level rather than concentrating on Grades 3 to 5. Additionally, there aren't many studies that compare teachers in public and private schools while also looking at

professional training and gender. Additionally, there is no

context-specific data for Uttar Pradesh districts, especially when it comes to the early use of the preparatory-stage framework.

In order to address these gaps, the current study looks at how teachers in government and private schools in the Rampur area of Uttar Pradesh feel about inclusive education. The study contrasts the opinions of teachers in Grades 3 to 5 based on their gender, kind of school and level of professional training. The study aims to provide empirical evidence that could help teacher education, school-level planning, professional development and the successful implementation of inclusive education under NEP 2020 by identifying the characteristics related with teachers' views.

In order to determine whether there are statistically significant differences between male and female teachers, government & private school teachers and professionally trained & untrained teachers, the study looks at teachers' general attitudes toward inclusive education at the preparatory stage. It is anticipated that the results would enhance our knowledge of teachers' readiness for inclusive education and provide guidance for developing inclusive and equitable learning environments in Indian schools.

The study was guided by the following null hypotheses:

- H_{o1}: There is no statistically significant difference in the attitudes of male and female teachers towards inclusive education.
- H_{o2}: There is no statistically significant difference in the attitudes of government and private school teachers towards inclusive education.
- H_{o3}: There is no statistically significant difference in the attitudes of professionally trained and untrained teachers towards inclusive education.

2. Materials and Methods

Research Approach and Design

The present study adopted a quantitative research approach to investigate teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education. A descriptive survey design was employed because it facilitates the collection of data from a representative sample and enables the analysis of existing conditions and opinions without manipulating variables.

The study followed a cross-sectional design in which data were collected at a single point in time. The design was considered suitable for assessing teachers' perceptions and comparing attitudes across different demographic categories.

Study Area and Context

The study was conducted in Rampur district of Uttar Pradesh, India. Rampur district comprises a mixture of urban and rural educational settings and includes both government and private schools. In accordance with the curricular structure proposed in NEP 2020, the study focused on teachers teaching at the preparatory stage, which includes Grades 3 to 5. Since teachers working at this stage play a crucial role in implementing inclusive pedagogical practices, their attitudes were considered important for understanding the practical realization of inclusive education under NEP 2020.

32 schools were selected for the study, including 16 government schools and 16 private schools. These schools represented diverse socio-economic and institutional backgrounds, thereby ensuring adequate representation of the study population.

Population of the study

The population of the study consisted of all teachers teaching classes 3 to 5 in government and private schools of Rampur district, Uttar Pradesh. Teachers employed in both management systems and actively engaged in classroom teaching during the academic session were considered eligible for participation.

Sampling Technique and Sample Size

Cluster sampling technique was employed for selecting the sample. In cluster sampling, naturally existing groups are selected rather than individual units. Schools served as clusters in the present study. Initially, government and private schools were identified and thereafter schools were selected to ensure representation from both sectors.

A total of 128 teachers participated in the study. The sample characteristics are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of the Sample

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	52	40.63

	Female	76	59.37
School Type	Government	46	35.94
	Private	82	64.06
Professional Qualification	Trained	62	48.44
	Untrained	66	51.56
Total		**128**	**100**

The sample was considered adequate for conducting descriptive and inferential statistical analyses.

Variables of the Study

-Independent Variables

The independent variables included:

- Gender (Male/Female)
- School Type (Government/Private)
- Professional Qualification (Trained/Untrained)

-Dependent Variable

The dependent variable of the study was:

- Teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education at the preparatory stage.

Research Instrument

Data were collected using a self-developed Teachers' Attitude towards Inclusive Education Questionnaire designed specifically for the objectives of the present investigation. The questionnaire consisted of 30 statements distributed across six dimensions:

- Concept and awareness of inclusive education
- Teacher's attitude and sensitivity
- Teaching-learning process
- School environment and resources
- Training and administrative aspects
- Social inclusion and equity

Each dimension contained five items, resulting in a total of thirty statements.

Responses were recorded on a five-point Likert scale with the following options:

- Strongly agree (5)
- Agree (4)
- Undecided (3)
- Disagree (2)
- Strongly disagree (1)

Negative items, wherever included, were reverse scored. Higher scores indicated more favourable attitudes towards inclusive education.

Validity of the Instrument

Content validity of the instrument was established through expert judgment. The initial draft of the questionnaire was submitted to specialists in education, teacher educators and experts in inclusive education. Suggestions regarding clarity, language, relevance and adequacy of the items were incorporated into the final form of the instrument.

The experts confirmed that the items adequately represented the construct of teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education and aligned with the provisions of NEP 2020. Therefore, the instrument possessed satisfactory content validity.

Reliability of the Instrument

The internal consistency reliability of the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. The obtained reliability coefficient was $\alpha = 0.82$, indicating good internal consistency and acceptable reliability for educational research. According to conventional standards, reliability coefficients above .70 are considered satisfactory for research purposes. Therefore, the instrument was regarded as sufficiently reliable for data collection.

Procedure of Data Collection

Prior permission was obtained from the heads of the selected schools before administering the questionnaire. Teachers were informed about the purpose of the study and assured that their responses would remain confidential and would be used exclusively for academic purposes.

The questionnaires were personally administered by the researcher during school visits. Participants were instructed to respond independently and honestly. Adequate time was provided for completing the

questionnaire and all completed schedules were collected immediately to minimize non-response and missing data.

The data collection process was conducted in a systematic manner, ensuring uniformity in administration across all participating schools.

Statistical Techniques Used for Data Analysis

After collection, the responses were coded and entered into Microsoft Excel and SPSS for statistical analysis. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were employed.

-Descriptive Statistics

The following descriptive measures were computed:

- Frequency
- Percentage
- Mean
- Standard Deviation

These statistics were used to describe the characteristics of the sample and determine the overall attitude levels of teachers.

-Inferential Statistics

Independent samples t-test was employed to examine differences between:

- Male and female teachers
- Government and private school teachers
- Trained and untrained teachers.

The t-value was computed using the formula:

$$t = \frac{\bar{X}_1 - \bar{X}_2}{\sqrt{\frac{S_1^2}{n_1} + \frac{S_2^2}{n_2}}}$$

Where $\bar{X}_1$ and $\bar{X}_2$ represent the group means, S_1^2 and S_2^2 represent the group variances, and n_1 and n_2 denote the respective sample sizes. The obtained t-value was compared with the critical value at the 0.05 level of significance to test the null hypothesis.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to standard ethical principles in educational research. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained from all respondents, and confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the research process. No personally identifiable information was collected, and the data were used solely for academic and research purposes. Participants were informed of their right to decline participation or withdraw from the study at any stage without any adverse consequences.

3. Results and Analysis

Descriptive Statistics of the Respondents

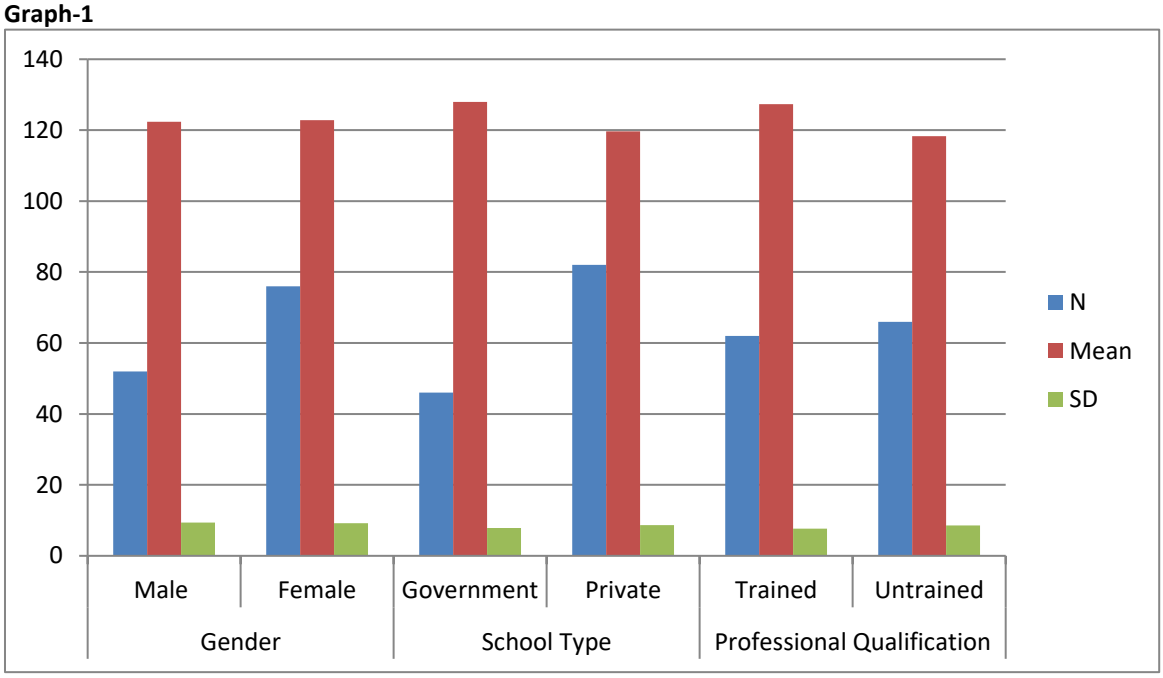
A total of 128 teachers teaching at the preparatory stage (Grades 3–5) participated in the study. Their attitudes towards inclusive education were measured using a self-developed 30-item five-point Likert scale. The respondents were classified according to gender, school type and professional training status. The descriptive statistics of teacher's attitude scores across gender, school type and professional qualification are presented in **Table 2**, while the corresponding graphical representation of the findings is presented in **Graph 1**.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Teacher's Attitude Scores

Variable	Category	N	Mean	SD
Gender	Male	52	122.40	9.40
	Female	76	122.84	9.24
School Type	Government	46	128.00	7.80
	Private	82	119.67	8.70

Professional Qualification	Trained	62	127.32	7.62
	Untrained	66	118.28	8.56

Graph-1



The mean scores indicate that teachers generally exhibited favorable attitudes towards inclusive education. However, variations were observed across school type and professional training categories.

Testing of Hypothesis H_{o1}

H_{o1}: *There is no statistically significant difference in the attitudes of male and female teachers towards inclusive education at the preparatory stage.*

To test this hypothesis, an independent samples t-test was employed. The descriptive comparison of attitude scores of male and female teachers is presented in **Table 3**, while the results of the independent samples t-test for gender are reported in **Table 4**.

Table 3: Comparison of Attitude Scores of Male and Female Teachers

Gender	N	Mean	SD
Male	52	122.40	9.40
Female	76	122.84	9.24

Table 4: Independent Samples t-Test for Gender

Variable	Mean Difference	t-value	df	p-value	Cohen's d
Male vs Female	-0.44	-0.26	126	0.795	0.05

Interpretation

The mean attitude score of female teachers (M = 122.84, SD = 9.24) was slightly higher than that of male teachers (M = 122.40, SD = 9.40). However, the obtained t-value, t(126) = -0.26, was not statistically significant (p = .795 > .05).

The effect size calculated through Cohen's d was 0.05, indicating a negligible practical difference between the two groups.

Decision

Since the p-value is greater than 0.05, the null hypothesis H_{o1} is accepted.

Finding

There is no statistically significant difference between male and female teachers regarding their attitudes towards inclusive education at the preparatory stage. Gender does not appear to influence teachers' perceptions of inclusive education.

Testing of Hypothesis H_{o2}

H_{o2}: *There is no statistically significant difference in the attitudes of government and private school teachers towards inclusive education at the preparatory stage.*

An independent samples t-test was performed to compare the mean attitude scores of government and private school teachers. The descriptive comparison of the attitudes of government and private school teachers is presented in **Table 5**, while the results of the independent samples t-test for school type are reported in **Table 6**.

Table 5: Comparison of Government and Private School Teachers

School Type	N	Mean	SD
Government	46	128.00	7.80
Private	82	119.67	8.70

Table 6: Independent Samples t-Test for School Type

Variable	Mean Difference	t-value	df	p-value	Cohen's d
Government vs Private	8.33	5.39	126	<.001	0.99

Interpretation

Government school teachers obtained significantly higher attitude scores (M = 128.00, SD = 7.80) than private school teachers (M = 119.67, SD = 8.70). The obtained t-value, t(126) = 5.39, was statistically significant at the 0.001 level.

The effect size (Cohen's d = 0.99) indicates a large practical effect, suggesting that school type substantially influences teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education.

Decision

Since $p < .001$, the null hypothesis H_{o2} is rejected.

Finding

A statistically significant difference exists between government and private school teachers regarding their attitudes toward inclusive education. Government school teachers exhibit significantly more positive attitudes than private school teachers.

Testing of Hypothesis H_{o3}

H_{o3}: *There is no statistically significant difference in the attitudes of professionally trained and untrained teachers towards inclusive education at the preparatory stage.*

To examine the influence of professional training, an independent samples t-test was applied. The descriptive comparison of the attitudes of trained and untrained Teachers is presented in **Table 7**, while the results of the independent samples t-test professional training are reported in **Table 8**.

Table 7: Comparison of Trained and Untrained Teachers

Professional Status	N	Mean	SD
Trained	62	127.32	7.62
Untrained	66	118.28	8.56

Table 8: Independent Samples t-Test for Professional Training

Variable	Mean Difference	t-value	df	p-value	Cohen's d
Trained vs Untrained	9.04	6.28	126	<.001	1.11

Interpretation

The mean attitude score of trained teachers (M = 127.32, SD = 7.62) was considerably higher than that of untrained teachers (M = 118.28, SD = 8.56). The difference between the two groups was statistically significant, $t(126) = 6.28$, $p < .001$.

The effect size (Cohen's d = 1.11) indicates a very large practical effect, demonstrating that professional training exerts a strong influence on teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education.

Decision

Since the p-value is less than .001, the null hypothesis H_{03} is rejected.

Finding

Professionally trained teachers possess significantly more positive attitudes towards inclusive education than untrained teachers.

Summary of Hypothesis Testing

The results of hypothesis testing are summarised in **Table 9**. Independent samples t-tests were conducted to examine differences in teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education based on gender, school type and professional training. As presented in Table 9, no statistically significant differences was found between male and female teachers (p=0.795). Therefore, H_{01} was not rejected. In contrast, statistically significant differences were found between government & private school teachers and between trained and untrained teachers (p<.001 in both cases). Accordingly, H_{02} and H_{03} were rejected.

Table 9: Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Statistical Test	p-value	Decision
H_{01}: No significant difference between male and female teachers	Independent Samples t-test	0.795	Accepted
H_{02}: No significant difference between government and private school teachers	Independent Samples t-test	<.001	Rejected
H_{03}: No significant difference between trained and untrained teachers	Independent Samples t-test	<.001	Rejected

Major Findings

The following major findings emerged from the analysis:

- Teachers teaching at the preparatory stage under NEP 2020 generally exhibited positive attitudes towards inclusive education.
- Male and female teachers did not differ significantly in their attitudes toward inclusive education.
- Government school teachers demonstrated significantly more favorable attitudes than private school teachers.
- Professionally trained teachers possessed significantly higher attitude scores than untrained teachers.
- Professional training emerged as the strongest predictor of positive attitudes, followed by school type.
- Gender had virtually no effect on teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education.

Overall, the findings suggest that institutional factors and professional preparation exert greater influence on teachers' attitudes than demographic characteristics. These findings have important implications for strengthening teacher preparation and ensuring successful implementation of inclusive education under the National Education Policy 2020.

4. Discussion

The present study examined teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education at the preparatory stage (Grades 3–5) in selected government and private schools of Rampur district, Uttar Pradesh. The results show that teachers' attitude toward inclusive education are typically positive. Gender did not significantly affect teachers' attitude, although statistically significant variations were noted with regard to professional training and school type. These results provide empirical evidence for the argument that successful implementation of inclusive education depends not only on teachers' willingness to embrace inclusion but also on the institutional and professional contexts in which they work [1,8].

Overall Teachers' Attitudes towards Inclusive Education

One of the most important findings of the study is that, during the preparatory stage, teachers showed generally positive attitudes toward inclusive education. Positive teacher attitudes are widely acknowledged as one of the biggest drivers of successful inclusive education because they impact classroom practices, instructional flexibility, learner participation and collaboration with parents and other professionals [9]. Teachers who value learner diversity are more likely to implement differentiated instruction, adopt learner-centered pedagogies, and establish supportive classroom environments that encourage participation by all students.

The results align with the UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report, which highlights that inclusive education

necessitates that educational institutions eliminate obstacles to involvement and guarantee equal learning opportunities for all students, irrespective of their socioeconomic status, gender, language, or disability [1]. In a similar vein, the UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report 2024 emphasizes that attaining inclusive and equitable quality education requires professional competent teachers and effective educational leadership [8].

The results align with the UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report, which highlights that inclusive education requires schools to remove barriers to participation and ensure equitable learning opportunities for every learner irrespective of their socio-economic status, gender, language or disability [1]. Similarly, the UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report 2024 highlights that effective educational leadership and professionally competent teachers are essential for achieving inclusive and equitable quality education [8].

The present results also support the meta-analysis conducted by Yada et al., who synthesized data from teachers across 55 countries and found that teachers generally possess positive attitudes toward inclusive education, although contextual factors affect the degree of acceptance [5]. Likewise, SavaŞ and İsaoĞlu found that teachers exhibited mixed attitudes and a limited understanding of inclusive education. The type and severity of special educational needs significantly influenced teachers' acceptance of inclusive practices, while inadequate knowledge, insufficient training, and limited practical experience emerged as major barriers [10].

Within the Indian context, Rangarajan et al. argued that the success of inclusion under NEP 2020 depends largely on teachers' preparedness and institutional commitment rather than policy formulation alone [7]. Therefore, the positive attitudes observed in the present study provide encouraging evidence regarding teachers' preparedness to implement the inclusive goal of NEP 2020.

Gender and Teachers' Attitudes towards Inclusive Education

The study found no statistically significant difference between male and female teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education. Although female teachers obtained slightly higher mean scores, the observed difference was statistically insignificant. Therefore, the first null hypothesis was accepted.

This result suggests that gender is not a major determinant of teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education. Rather, teachers' beliefs appear to be influenced more strongly by professional competence, educational experiences, institutional support and opportunities for professional learning than by demographic characteristics.

The results are in line with those reported by Saloviita, who found that gender differences in teachers' attitudes were typically negligible and statistically unimportant after controlling for other professional variables [11]. Similarly, Yada et al. concluded that gender explains only a limited proportion of variation in teachers' attitudes across different educational contexts [5].

Additionally, recent studies by Selisko et al. also demonstrated that teachers' self-efficacy and pedagogical competence exert greater influence on inclusive attitudes than gender or age [12]. These results collectively suggest that inclusive education should be promoted through competency-based professional development rather than demographic targeting.

The findings also align with the objectives of NEP 2020, which emphasizes equal professional opportunities and continuous capacity building for all teachers irrespective of gender [6]. Consequently, teacher education programmes should focus on strengthening professional competencies equally among male and female teachers.

School Type and Teachers' Attitudes towards Inclusive Education

The study revealed statistically significant differences between government and private school teachers. Government school teachers exhibited significantly more positive attitudes towards inclusive education than teachers working in private schools. The large effect size further indicates that institutional context substantially influences teachers' attitude.

This result supports earlier studies showing that institutional resources, administrative support and exposure to government educational initiatives shape teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education. Sinha and Khullar examined the attitudes of government and private primary school teachers toward inclusive education The findings revealed that both male and female teachers demonstrated positive attitudes toward inclusive education, with no significant gender-based differences in their attitudes across government and private primary schools [13].

In a similar vein, Rangarajan et al. contended that achieving educational equity under NEP 2020 requires institutional readiness, resource availability and supportive school leadership in addition to progressive policy frameworks [7]. Schools with more robust administrative support systems are generally better positioned to successfully implement inclusive educational practices.

One possible explanation for the present study is that government school teachers are more frequently exposed to capacity-building programmes organized through Samagra Shiksha, State Councils of Educational Research and Training (SCERTs) and District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETs). Such programmes provide teachers with opportunities to develop knowledge regarding inclusive pedagogies, differentiated instruction and

learner diversity.

On the other hand, professional development opportunities within many private schools frequently differ based on institutional priorities and available resources. As a result, teachers may receive less systematic exposure to inclusive educational practices. Similar observations have been reported in studies examining institutional preparedness for educational reforms under NEP 2020 [14].

These results imply that educational authorities should ensure equitable access to professional development programmes across both government and private schools to facilitate uniform implementation of inclusive education.

Professional Training and Teachers' Attitudes towards Inclusive Education

Among all variables examined in the study, professional training emerged as the best predictor of positive attitudes towards inclusive education. Trained teachers demonstrated significantly higher attitude scores than untrained teachers and the observed effect size indicated a considerable practical difference.

This result provide compelling evidence for earlier studies that teacher preparation as one of the most the key factors influencing successful inclusion. Professional training enhances teachers' understanding of learner diversity, differentiated instruction, classroom management, collaborative teaching, assessment adaptations and inclusive pedagogical strategies.

The results align with the findings of Sharma and Sokal, who found that teachers possessing stronger instructional efficacy and professional competence demonstrate greater confidence in implementing inclusive education [10]. Similarly, Yada et al. found that teacher training significantly improves teachers' attitudes and confidence across diverse educational contexts [5].

Wayal reviewed the teacher education reforms proposed under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and examined their role in strengthening teacher professionalism in India. The study highlighted major reforms, including the Four-Year Integrated Teacher Education Programme (ITEP), National Professional Standards for Teachers (NPST), continuous professional development, teacher licensing and practice-based training. The findings indicated that these reforms aim to develop competent, reflective and professionally skilled teachers capable of delivering inclusive, learner-centered and competency-based education [15]. Similarly,

recent research indicates that although awareness regarding inclusive education has increased among pre-service teachers, opportunities for practical classroom experience remain limited [16].

The large effect size observed in the present study demonstrates that funding in teacher education and continuous professional development can substantially improve teachers' readiness to implement inclusive practices. These findings reinforce the importance of competency-based teacher education as envisaged under NEP 2020.

Implications for the Implementation of NEP 2020

The National Education Policy 2020's implementation of inclusive education will be significantly impacted by the findings. While teachers generally demonstrated positive attitudes towards inclusion, positive attitudes alone cannot ensure successful classroom implementation. Teachers require continuous professional development, institutional support, adequate infrastructure, accessible learning resources and collaborative educational environments to translate inclusive principles into practice [1,6].

The significant influence of professional training observed in this study suggests that teacher education institutions should strengthen courses related to inclusive pedagogy, differentiated instruction, classroom diversity, formative assessment and Universal Design for Learning. Continuous in-service training should emphasize practical classroom strategies rather than theoretical discussions alone.

The differences observed between government and private school teachers further indicate the need for equitable capacity-building initiatives across different educational sectors. Strengthening collaboration among policymakers, teacher education institutions, school administrators and teachers will facilitate more effective implementation of NEP 2020 and contribute to achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 relating to inclusive and equitable quality education [8].

Contribution of the Present Study

The present study makes several important contributions to the literature on inclusive education. First, it focuses specifically on the preparatory stage (Grades 3–5), which represents a critical component of the 5+3+3+4 curricular framework introduced through NEP 2020 but has received relatively limited empirical attention.

Second, the study adds region-specific data to the expanding body of research on inclusive education in India by presenting empirical data from the Rampur area of Uttar Pradesh.

Third, the study shows that professional training and institutional context exert considerably stronger influence on teachers' attitudes than demographic variables such as gender. These findings provide useful evidence for policymakers, curriculum developers, teacher educators and school administrators seeking to strengthen inclusive educational practices.

Overall, the study demonstrates that the successful implementation of inclusive education under NEP 2020

depends upon professionally competent teachers, supportive school environments, effective institutional leadership and sustained professional development. Strengthening these dimensions will facilitate the creation of equitable and inclusive learning environments where every learner can participate, learn, and succeed.

Conclusion

This study examined teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education at the preparatory stage (Grades 3–5) under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 in selected government and private schools of Rampur district, Uttar Pradesh. The result shows that teachers generally hold positive attitudes towards inclusive education, suggesting a favorable environment for implementing the inclusive vision of NEP 2020. The study found no statistically significant difference in attitudes between male and female teachers, indicating that gender does not influence teachers' attitude of inclusive education. However, significant differences were observed based on school type and professional training. Government school teachers demonstrated more positive attitudes than private school teachers, while professionally trained teachers exhibited significantly higher attitude scores than untrained teachers, highlighting the critical role of teacher preparation and institutional support.

These results imply that the successful implementation of inclusive education depends not only on policy initiatives but also on continuous professional development, supportive school environments and adequate educational resources. Strengthening pre-service and in-service teacher education with a focus on inclusive pedagogy, differentiated instruction, Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and classroom diversity management is essential for translating the objectives of NEP 2020 into effective classroom practices.

The study contributes to the limited empirical literature on teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education at the preparatory stage within the NEP 2020 framework. Although the findings are based on a single district and should be interpreted cautiously, they provide useful evidence for policymakers, teacher educators and school administrators. Future research should include larger and more diverse samples and explore additional factors such as teacher self-efficacy, school climate and classroom practices. Overall, strengthening teacher capacity and institutional support will be fundamental to achieving inclusive and equitable quality education in line with NEP 2020 and Sustainable Development Goal 4.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the conduct, analysis or publication of this study.

Ethical Approval: Not Applicable

Data Availability

The data used and analyzed during this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. However, the data are not publicly available due to privacy and confidentiality considerations involving research participants.

Declaration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) Assistance

During the preparation of this manuscript, generative AI and AI-assisted technologies were used only to support language refinement, grammar correction and improvement of readability. The authors reviewed, edited and verified all content assisted by these technologies and take full responsibility for the final content of the manuscript.

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