

Teaching All, Reaching All

Pre-service Teachers' Efficacy in Managing Diverse Classrooms

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Abstract

Aligned with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020's emphasis on inclusive education, this study examines pre-service teachers' efficacy in addressing diverse learning needs and explores the key factors influencing their ability to manage inclusive classrooms effectively. A mixed-methods research design was employed to achieve the stated objectives. Data were collected from 165 pre-service teachers using the Teacher Efficacy for Inclusive Practices (TEIP) scale and open-ended questions. The findings reveal no significant gender differences in overall teaching efficacy; however, male participants demonstrated marginally higher efficacy in classroom management and collaborative practices. The study also identifies several constraints affecting pre-service teachers' preparedness, including limited practical exposure, inadequate resources, inaccessible infrastructure, and insufficient support from key stakeholders. These challenges hinder their ability to manage diverse classroom needs and behaviours effectively. The findings underscore the need for comprehensive teacher education programmes that integrate strong theoretical foundations with meaningful practical experiences, particularly in the areas of adaptive instructional strategies and inclusive classroom management. This study contributes to the broader discourse on teacher preparation by highlighting how enhanced self-efficacy can facilitate the creation of equitable learning environments that accommodate learner diversity. It further emphasises the importance of sustained professional development to bridge persistent gaps in the implementation of inclusive practices.

Keywords: Pre-service Teachers, Teaching Efficacy, Inclusive Practices, Classroom Management

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INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education has emerged as a critical global priority, as reflected in UNESCO's sustained advocacy (UNESCO, 1994, 2015). This commitment is further reinforced by Sustainable Development Goal 4, which calls for "inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all" (UNESCO, 2009, 2015). While the philosophical foundations of Inclusive Education (IE) have gained widespread international acceptance, many countries continue to face challenges in transforming educational systems to accommodate all learners within inclusive settings (Loreman, 1999).

In India, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 addresses these challenges through targeted measures such as specialised teacher training, alternative assessment mechanisms under PARAKH, flexible schooling options, and technology-mediated parental engagement (NEP 2020, Sections 6.12–6.14). Despite this policy alignment, operational definitions, and classroom-level enactments of inclusive practices remain highly variable (Slee, 2001).

The National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education (NCTE, 2009) underscores the centrality of teacher competence in achieving inclusive education, emphasising that teachers' pedagogical knowledge, attitudes, and skills form the foundation for effective inclusive classroom practices. However, the implementation of Inclusive Education

is a complex, multi-dimensional process influenced by interrelated systemic, institutional, and individual factors (Mitchell, 2015; Schuelka and Engsig, 2020).

Teachers play a pivotal role in translating inclusive education policies into classroom realities, as their instructional decisions and pedagogical adaptability significantly shape students' learning experiences (Soodak *et al.*, 1998). Contemporary teacher education programmes aim to prepare future educators for diverse classrooms by integrating theoretical knowledge, pedagogical strategies, subject expertise, and practicum experiences. Research indicates that pre-service teachers' efficacy beliefs and attitudes strongly influence their instructional practices, professional confidence, and willingness to adopt inclusive strategies—often more so than other components of teacher training (Krischler and Pit-ten Cate, 2019).

Empirical studies suggest that pre-service teachers with prior exposure to inclusive classrooms tend to hold more positive attitudes towards the inclusion of students with disabilities (Varcoe and Boyle, 2014), and these attitudes often persist throughout teacher education programmes (Beacham and Rouse, 2012). Consequently, pre-service teacher education is widely recognised as a critical phase for developing the competencies necessary for effective inclusive teaching (Loreman *et al.*, 2005, 2006, 2007).

While inclusive education courses have been shown to improve pre-service teachers' attitudes and self-efficacy (Burton and Pace, 2009; Carroll *et al.*, 2003), they have also been criticised for overemphasising theoretical knowledge at the expense of practical skill development (Boe *et al.*, 2007). This mismatch contributes to a persistent theory–practice gap in inclusive education implementation (McLeskey and Billingsley, 2008). Research consistently highlights concerns regarding pre-service teachers' preparedness to manage diverse classrooms effectively (Druckman and Bjork, 1994; Sharma *et al.*, 2009), with particular gaps noted in classroom management, instructional differentiation, and institutional support (Yasmin *et al.*, 2020).

Assessing pre-service teachers' beliefs, efficacy, and readiness for inclusive education is therefore essential. Although some teachers express confidence in their ability to support diverse learners, significant theoretical and logistical challenges continue to impede the realisation of full inclusion (Glenn, 2018; Jordan, 2018; Silverman, 2010). Moreover, teachers' efficacy in implementing inclusive practices varies considerably based on training experiences and personal beliefs about inclusion (Loreman *et al.*, 2013; Miesera *et al.*, 2019).

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their capability to organise

and execute actions required to achieve specific goals (Bandura, 1997). Within educational research, Bandura's social cognitive theory has been extensively applied to examine teachers' confidence in supporting diverse learners and implementing inclusive practices (Ahsan *et al.*, 2012; Loreman *et al.*, 2013; Sharma *et al.*, 2012). Teacher self-efficacy is regarded as one of the few teacher-related attributes that directly influence student outcomes, making it a critical construct in inclusive education research (Hoy *et al.*, 2009).

The construct of teacher self-efficacy is particularly relevant to inclusive education, as it is closely linked to actual classroom practices and instructional decision-making (Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, and Hoy, 1998). Bandura (1997) identifies four primary sources of efficacy beliefs: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and emotional or physiological states.

Mastery experiences, derived from prior successful performance, are the most powerful source of efficacy beliefs, as they provide concrete evidence of competence and resilience in the face of challenges (Bhati and Sethy, 2022). Vicarious experiences, gained through observing others, contribute to efficacy development but exert a comparatively weaker influence than direct experiences (Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2007). Verbal persuasion, such as constructive feedback from mentors and peers, can enhance efficacy when it is specific, consistent, and credible. Finally,

emotional and physiological states influence individuals' perceptions of competence, as heightened stress or anxiety may undermine confidence, while positive emotional states can enhance perceived capability (Bandura, 1997).

In inclusive education contexts, classroom management efficacy represents a crucial dimension of teachers' self-efficacy, particularly when addressing diverse learner needs. Although substantial empirical evidence supports the benefits of inclusive education, research has consistently examined the challenges teachers face in managing behaviour and delivering differentiated instruction in inclusive classrooms (Romi and Leyser, 2006). Pre-service teachers who employ differentiated instructional strategies and effective behaviour management techniques, tend to demonstrate higher perceived efficacy, despite encountering implementation challenges (Main and Hammond, 2008; Mergler and Tangen, 2010; Shaukat *et al.*, 2013).

Educators with strong self-efficacy beliefs are more likely to adopt varied behaviour management strategies (Woolfolk *et al.*, 1990), implement inclusive pedagogical practices effectively, and utilise research-based instructional approaches (Guskey, 1988). Understanding pre-service teachers' efficacy beliefs is therefore essential for strengthening teacher preparation programmes and ensuring the successful implementation of inclusive education.

TEACHING EFFICACY AND INCLUSIVE PRACTICES

Grounded in Bandura's (1995) social cognitive theory, self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their capability to plan and execute actions required to achieve specific goals. Unlike general self-confidence, Bandura's conceptualisation emphasises context-specific competencies, recognising that efficacy beliefs are task- and situation-dependent (Loreman *et al.*, 2013). Within the field of inclusive education, teachers' self-efficacy has increasingly been recognised as a crucial indicator of their effectiveness in managing diverse classroom contexts (Sharma, Loreman, and Forlin, 2012; Weisel and Dror, 2006). These beliefs encompass both perceived competence and confidence and are predominantly examined through Bandura's theoretical framework (Bruder *et al.*, 2013; Kawamura, 2007).

Teacher self-efficacy significantly influences classroom practices, pedagogical decision-making, and professional attitudes. Empirical evidence suggests that nearly 25 teaching practices are directly shaped by teachers' attitudinal dispositions (Damianidou and Phtiaka, 2018). Effective implementation of inclusive education requires educators to adopt attitudes that prioritise equity, access, and meaningful learning opportunities for all students (Navarro-Mateu *et al.*, 2020).

Studies further indicate that teachers with positive attitudes demonstrate greater instructional flexibility and adaptability in responding to diverse learner needs (Ismailos *et al.*, 2019).

Research also highlights a strong association between teachers' attitudes and their pedagogical effectiveness. Educators with favourable dispositions are more likely to implement evidence-based inclusive strategies consistently, whereas negative attitudes often hinder inclusive practice adoption. Teachers' professional knowledge plays a mediating role in this process, as limited understanding of inclusive principles is frequently associated with reduced instructional adaptation and strategy use (Kurniawati *et al.*, 2017). Therefore, the development of positive attitudes alongside robust professional knowledge is essential for the successful implementation of inclusive practices in mainstream classrooms.

Classroom management efficacy has been identified as a critical component of effective inclusive education. Research demonstrates a significant relationship between teacher effectiveness and successful classroom management in inclusive settings (Chao *et al.*, 2018). Educators with high self-efficacy exhibit stronger organisational skills, greater instructional enthusiasm, and more equitable teaching practices. They are also more inclined to adopt differentiated and innovative strategies to meet diverse learner

needs (Marković, 2022). Comparative studies reveal that the teachers with high self-efficacy invest greater effort, demonstrate increased resilience, and display higher adaptability in facilitating student learning than those with lower efficacy beliefs (Schwab and Alnahdi, 2020).

The reciprocal relationship between self-efficacy and inclusive practice implementation is well established, whereby successful teaching experiences reinforce professional confidence, motivation, and sustained engagement with inclusive practices (Subban *et al.*, 2021). Cross-cultural studies using the Teacher Efficacy for Inclusive Practices (TEIP) scale have reported significant variations in teachers' efficacy beliefs across national contexts (Sharma, Loreman, and Forlin, 2012). Similarly, applications of the Teacher Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES) have generally reported high levels of teacher efficacy (Smith, 2012; Tschannen-Moran and Hoy, 2001). However, as noted by Bruder *et al.* (2013), further research is required to identify the specific factors shaping teacher efficacy beliefs and to determine which components of teacher education most effectively foster professional self-efficacy.

Contemporary research has increasingly focused on three core dimensions of inclusive teaching efficacy: instructional adaptation, collaborative competence, and behaviour management (Sharma and Jacobs, 2016; Sharma, Loreman *et al.*, 2012). Recent

studies have specifically examined efficacy levels among educators working with diverse learner populations (Crispel and Kasperski, 2021; Marković, 2022), building on over three decades of scholarship exploring the relationship between teacher efficacy and classroom practice.

Assessing self-efficacy among pre-service teachers serves dual purposes: evaluating the effectiveness of teacher preparation programmes and informing targeted curricular improvements (Bruder *et al.*, 2013). As Macmillan and Meyer (2006) emphasise, cultivating strong self-efficacy beliefs during initial teacher education is fundamental to the successful implementation of inclusive education, and to addressing the complexities of classroom diversity.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The present study aims to assess pre-service teachers' efficacy in implementing inclusive educational practices and to identify key factors influencing their ability to manage diverse classroom environments effectively. Specifically, the study focuses on three interrelated dimensions:

- the development of teacher confidence,
- the formation of inclusive attitudes, and
- the cultivation of teaching efficacy required to create adaptable and inclusive learning environments.

Through systematic analysis of these dimensions, the study seeks to examine how teacher education curricula can be strengthened to prepare better future educators for diverse learner needs. The findings are expected to provide empirical evidence to support the restructuring of teacher preparation programmes, particularly through the incorporation of targeted training components that enhance inclusive teaching competencies.

Beyond the pre-service teacher development, the study has broader implications for improving learning outcomes among diverse student populations and advancing educational equity. By addressing the gap between theoretical preparation and practical classroom demands, the research contributes to the professionalisation and sustainability of inclusive teaching practices within mainstream education systems.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

RO₁: To examine gender differences in the pre-service teachers' efficacy regarding the implementation of inclusive practices.

RO₂: To explore the classroom management challenges encountered by the pre-service teachers.

RO₃: To identify key factors contributing to pre-service teachers' efficacy to managing inclusive classrooms effectively.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study employed a mixed-methods research design (Ary, *et al.*, 2010), integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches to comprehensively address the research objectives. This design facilitated methodological triangulation and enhanced the validity and depth of the findings by allowing complementary insights from multiple data sources.

Participants

The sample comprised 165 final-year pre-service teachers, including 75 females and 90 males. All participants had completed a compulsory course on inclusive education and had fulfilled their practicum requirements in mainstream classroom settings.

Instrument

The Teacher Efficacy for Inclusive Practices (TEIP) scale (Sharma *et al.*, 2012) was used to measure the pre-service teachers' efficacy beliefs. The TEIP scale is a widely used and validated instrument in inclusive education research (Ahsan *et al.*, 2012; Park *et al.*, 2014; Shaukat *et al.*, 2013; Specht, 2016; Specht and Metsala, 2018), although findings across contexts have shown variability.

Adapted from the Educators' Perceptions Scale, the TEIP comprises 18 items, rated on a six-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 6 = strongly agree). Exploratory

factor analysis during the scale's development reduced the original 30 items to 18 statements, evenly distributed, across three domains:

- Efficacy in Inclusive Instruction (EII),
- Efficacy in Collaboration (EC), and
- Efficacy in Managing Behaviour (EMB) (Park *et al.*, 2014).

The instrument demonstrates high internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.89$ for total scores; Sharma *et al.*, 2012), with total scores ranging from 18 to 108 (Sharma and Sokal, 2015). Confirmatory factor analysis further validated the tri-dimensional structure, highlighting the interrelated nature of the three efficacy constructs (Park *et al.*, 2014).

To address the second research objective, open-ended questions were included to explore classroom management challenges faced by pre-service teachers in inclusive settings. For the third objective, an extensive review of existing literature was conducted to identify factors influencing teaching efficacy in managing inclusive classrooms.

Data Collection and Interpretation

Data were collected using a survey method through direct administration of questionnaires (Ary *et al.*, 2010). The questionnaires were administered to 165 pre-service teachers enrolled in the teacher education programme, at the Central University of South Bihar (CUSB), Gaya, Bihar.

Table 1
Descriptive statistics of the study

Variable	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
TEIP Scale	165	62	108	90.59	9.174	-0.368	0.386

Initial descriptive analysis indicated a non-normal distribution of the data, as evidenced by significant results from both the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test ($D = 0.093$, $p < .001$) and the Shapiro–Wilk test ($W = .974$, $p < .003$). Consequently, non-parametric statistical methods were employed for data analysis using SPSS (Version 2020) to ensure appropriate interpretation of the non-normally distributed dataset.

FINDINGS

Gender Differences

The analysis revealed that, these are no statistically significant gender difference in teaching efficacy for inclusive practices ($z = -0.097$, $p > 0.05$). The findings indicate comparable levels of teaching efficacy among both male (mean rank = 83.33) and female (mean rank = 82.61)

pre-service teachers. Participants demonstrated notable competence in engaging parents, collaborating with itinerant teachers and allied professionals, and managing classroom behaviour effectively.

Although male participants exhibited marginally higher efficacy in behaviour management and collaborative practices, female participants demonstrated relatively stronger efficacy in implementing inclusive instructional strategies.

These findings are consistent with studies, reporting similar teaching efficacy across genders (Vogiatzi *et al.*, 2022; Bosse and Spörer, 2014). However, contrasting evidence exists in the literature, with some studies reporting higher efficacy among female pre-service teachers (Specht and Metsala, 2018; Shaukat *et al.*, 2013; Gao and Mager, 2011;

Table 2
Result of Mann-Whitney U test (Factors-wise Gender difference)

Factors of the TEIP scale	Gender	N	Mean Rank	z-Value	p-Value
EII	Male	90	80.19	-0.834	$p > 0.05$
	Female	75	86.37		
EMB	Male	90	85.45	-0.219	$p > 0.05$
	Female	75	80.06		
EC	Male	90	83.74	-0.219	$p > 0.05$
	Female	75	82.11		
Total TEIP	Male	90	83.33	-0.097	$p > 0.05$
	Female	75	82.61		

Forlin *et al.*, 2010), while others have found greater efficacy among male pre-service teachers (Ismailos *et al.*, 2019; Specht, 2016; Ahsan *et al.*, 2012). These mixed findings suggest that teaching efficacy may be shaped more by contextual and experiential factors than by gender alone.

CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED BY PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS

In line with the second research objective, open-ended responses from 165 pre-service teachers were analysed to explore classroom management challenges encountered in inclusive settings. The data were thematically analysed using the auto-coding technique in NVivo 15 (trial version). The findings revealed that the challenges emerged from multiple intersecting dimensions, primarily rooted in administrative, structural, instructional, and attitudinal constraints.

Structural and Resource Barriers

The implementation of inclusive education was found to be hindered by significant structural and resource-related barriers, including inaccessible infrastructure and inadequate teaching resources. Pre-service teachers frequently reported that the absence of ramps, poorly designed classrooms, and lack of accessible facilities limited the participation of students with disabilities. Additionally, respondents highlighted shortages of learning

materials, ICT tools, and assistive technologies, which restricted their ability to address diverse learning styles effectively. These findings align with previous studies that identify inadequate physical infrastructure and resource scarcity as major impediments to inclusive education (Lakshmi, 2018; Priyanka and Samia, 2018; Bhatnagar and Das, 2014).

Insufficient Support Services and Rigid Curricula

The study further revealed the systemic challenges such as rigid curricula, oversized classes, limited individualised support, and inadequate collaboration among stakeholders. Pre-service teachers reported that these factors significantly constrained their preparedness for inclusive classrooms. The lack of mentoring support and inflexible curricular frameworks limited opportunities for differentiated instruction and adaptive teaching practices (Ainscow, 2020; Mukherjee and Bear, 2017; Bhatnagar and Das, 2014).

Social and Attitudinal Barriers

Social and attitudinal factors also emerged as prominent barriers to inclusion. While parental involvement is known to enhance academic and social outcomes (Lau *et al.*, 2011), many participants reported minimal parental engagement and exclusion from educational decision-making processes. Respondents identified negative attitudes, social stigma,

and discriminatory practices from peers and school personnel as factors contributing to unwelcoming classroom environments. One participant noted that, “negative attitudes and low expectations from teachers result in isolation, low self-esteem, and reduced engagement among students with disabilities.”

Additionally, teachers with unfavourable attitudes towards inclusion were perceived as less willing to teach students with disabilities, citing the additional demands of assistive technology, individualised support, and differentiated pacing. Consistent with earlier research, practicum experiences further revealed classroom management, time management, instructional delivery, and anxiety regulation as significant challenges for pre-service teachers (Weber and Greiner, 2019; Ahsan *et al.*, 2013).

Professional and Instructional Challenges

Pre-service teachers reported insufficient training and limited practical experience in planning instruction and assessment for diverse classrooms. The participants expressed difficulty in balancing the needs of students with disabilities alongside the rest of the class due to time constraints, limited access to assistive technologies, and insufficient collaboration with the stakeholders. The findings also revealed a lack of trained personnel, limited awareness of disability-related

issues, and insufficient sensitisation towards inclusive education among the stakeholders. These findings corroborate earlier studies highlighting similar professional and instructional constraints (Priyanka and Samia, 2018).

FACTORS INFLUENCING TEACHING EFFICACY IN MANAGING AN INCLUSIVE CLASSROOM

Teaching Self-efficacy and Attitudes

Extant literature consistently demonstrates a strong positive relationship between teachers' self-efficacy beliefs and supportive attitudes towards inclusive education (Savolainen *et al.*, 2012). Teachers with higher self-efficacy are more effective in promoting student engagement (Zee and Koomen, 2020), fostering positive teacher-student relationships (Holzberger *et al.*, 2014), and improving academic outcomes (Kim and Seo, 2018; Caprara *et al.*, 2006).

Pre-service teachers with positive attitudes towards inclusion show greater confidence in implementing inclusive instructional strategies and managing classroom behaviour, which contributes to improved classroom climate, student satisfaction, and group cohesion (Buric and Kim, 2020; Monsen *et al.*, 2014).

Professional Training and Skill Development

Comprehensive professional training and sustained practicum exposure,

are essential for enhancing teachers' confidence and competence in inclusive classrooms (Forlin *et al.*, 2010). Structured professional development integrating Universal Design for Learning (UDL), adaptive pedagogy, and evidence-based behaviour management strategies, are critical. Empirical evidence indicates that immersive teaching experiences with diverse learners significantly strengthen behaviour management efficacy (Specht and Metsala, 2018).

Access to Resources and Support Systems

Teaching efficacy is strongly influenced by access to instructional resources, assistive technologies, and institutional support. The use of digital tools and adaptive technologies enhances student engagement and reduces behavioural challenges (González-Pérez, 2014; Simonsen *et al.*, 2008). Leadership commitment and collaborative frameworks involving special educators and administrators further strengthen inclusive practice (Ainscow and Sandill, 2010; Florian and Black-Hawkins, 2011).

Classroom Environment and Student Diversity

Inclusive classroom management requires flexible, learner-centred pedagogies, and supportive learning environments. Research highlights the importance of differentiated instruction, positive behaviour support, and responsive teaching

practices in promoting engagement among diverse learners (Tomlinson, 2014; Kahveci, 2023). Optimal class sizes, co-teaching models, and favourable student-teacher ratios further facilitate effective classroom management (Friend, 2008; Blatchford *et al.*, 2003).

Policy, Collaboration, and Peer Support

Supportive institutional policies and sustained professional development enable teachers to implement inclusive practices more effectively (Oliver and Reschly, 2007). Collaboration among educators, specialists, parents, and administrators strengthens teacher efficacy and promotes inclusive school cultures (Epstein, 2011; Friend and Cook, 2010).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The present study found no significant gender differences in overall teaching self-efficacy, consistent with prior research (Vogiatzi *et al.*, 2022; Bosse and Spörer, 2014). However, minor variations were observed, with male pre-service teachers reporting slightly higher efficacy in behaviour management. These findings suggest that teacher education programmes effectively develop pedagogical, collaborative, and classroom management skills, supporting Bandura's (1997) assertion that mastery experiences enhance self-efficacy.

Despite comparable efficacy across genders, substantial implementation

challenges persist, including inadequate infrastructure, limited resources, rigid curricula, large class sizes, and insufficient institutional support. Pre-service teachers reported feeling inadequately prepared for inclusive classrooms, particularly in behaviour management and instructional adaptation, highlighting a persistent theory–practice gap. Limited exposure to inclusive settings during training, underscores the need for curriculum reform that integrates sustained practicum experiences

with diverse learners (Lancaster and Bain, 2010; Brownell *et al.*, 2005).

Overall, effective inclusive education requires comprehensive systemic support, encompassing flexible infrastructure, learner-centred pedagogies, appropriate class sizes, adequate resources, and ongoing professional development. Without these structural and institutional reforms, inclusive classrooms will continue to challenge teacher effectiveness and constrain student potential (Zwane and Malale, 2018).

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