



A Study of Teachers Awareness and Attitude towards Inclusive Education Practice in Primary School in Calabar

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Abstract

This study assessed the awareness and attitude towards inclusive practices among primary school teachers in Calabar South Local Government Area. Descriptive survey research design was adopted. Multistage method was used in selecting participants. Random sampling technique was used to select 270 primary school teachers 20 primary. A self-structure instrument titled “ Teacher Awareness and Attitude to Inclusive Education Practice (TAAIEP: 0.67)” was used in this study. Inferential analytical tools (Regression Analysis, Moderation Analysis, Multiple Regression and Hierarchical Regression) were uses for data analysis. Study findings indicated that awareness significantly predicts attitudes toward inclusive education, interaction between awareness and gender is not statistically significant in teachers’ attitude toward inclusive education, traditional cultural beliefs (spiritual/supernatural, stigma/discrimination) significantly and negatively predict attitudes toward inclusion and perceived behavioural control significantly predicts behavioural intentions toward inclusive education. The study concludes that teachers’ awareness is critical in shaping their attitude toward inclusion of learners with special needs educationally. To enhance the teachers’ knowledge and increase their readiness to accept learners with special needs, it is recommended that stakeholders should embark on aggressive awareness creation on inclusive education among regular primary school teachers.

Keywords: teacher’s awareness, teachers attitude toward inclusive education, inclusive education practice

Introduction

Inclusive education has become a fundamental principle of educational reform across the world, emphasizing the right of every child, irrespective of disability, gender, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status, to access quality education within mainstream schools. The concept is rooted in the belief that diversity should be recognized as a resource for learning rather than a barrier to educational participation (Ainscow, 2020). The adoption of inclusive education is supported by international frameworks such as the Salamanca Statement, the United Nations Convention on the

Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and Sustainable Development Goal 4, advocates for equitable and inclusive quality education for all (United Nations, 2015; UNESCO, 2020). In Nigeria, inclusive education has been integrated into national education policies to ensure that children with disabilities and other special educational needs receive equitable educational opportunities. However, successful implementation depends largely on teachers, whose awareness, knowledge, and attitudes significantly influence classroom practices and learners' educational experiences Ekeh & Oladayo, 2022).

According to Sharma, et al. (2021), teachers occupy a strategic position in the implementation of inclusive education because they are responsible for adapting instructional strategies, classroom management techniques, assessment methods, and learning environments to accommodate diverse learners. Teachers who possess adequate awareness of inclusive education policies and demonstrate positive attitudes toward learners with disabilities are more likely to implement inclusive practices effectively (Federal Ministry of Education, 2021). Conversely, inadequate awareness, misconceptions about disability, limited professional preparation, and negative attitudes may hinder successful inclusion and contribute to educational exclusion. Research indicates that teachers' awareness is shaped by factors such as professional training, years of teaching experience, access to inclusive education resources, and institutional support, while attitudes are influenced by perceived competence, workload, administrative support, and cultural beliefs regarding disability (Ainscow, 2020; Sharma et al., 2021).

Adigun and Nzima, (2025) found that globally, empirical studies have consistently demonstrated that teacher awareness and attitudes remain among the strongest predictors of successful inclusive education. For instance, Sharma et al. (2021) reported that teachers who received specialized training in inclusive education exhibited significantly higher levels of awareness and more positive attitudes toward teaching learners with disabilities than those without such training. Similarly, Aihie and Uwaoluetan, (2022) observed that countries achieving meaningful progress in inclusive education invested substantially in teacher capacity development,

continuous professional learning, and institutional support systems (Alassaf, 2025). In many developing countries, however, inadequate teacher preparation, insufficient instructional materials, overcrowded classrooms, and weak policy implementation continue to undermine inclusive education practices despite supportive policy frameworks (UNESCO, 2020).

Within Nigeria, studies have revealed persistent challenges affecting the implementation of inclusive education at the primary school level. Omede and Bakare (2021) found that although many primary school teachers were familiar with the concept of inclusive education, their practical understanding and confidence in implementing inclusive instructional strategies remained limited. Similarly, Ekeh and Oladayo (2022) reported that many teachers expressed willingness to teach learners with disabilities but were constrained by inadequate professional training, insufficient teaching resources, and poor infrastructural support. These findings suggest that awareness alone may not necessarily translate into positive attitudes or effective classroom practices (Alassaf, 2025a & b). Consequently, there is a need for continuous assessment of teachers' awareness and attitudes to inform policy interventions and teacher professional development programmes aimed at strengthening inclusive education across Nigerian schools.

In Cross River State, particularly in Calabar, the implementation of inclusive education has gained increasing attention following national policy reforms and advocacy by governmental and non-governmental organizations. Nevertheless, anecdotal evidence suggests that many public primary schools continue to face challenges such as inadequate teacher preparation, limited access to assistive learning materials, overcrowded classrooms, and insufficient support services for learners with disabilities (Etieyibo & Omiegbe, 2019; Drew, 2023; Alassaf, 2025). These challenges may influence teachers' awareness and attitudes toward inclusive education, ultimately affecting classroom implementation and learning outcomes. Although previous studies have investigated inclusive education in different regions of Nigeria, relatively few have focused specifically on primary school teachers in Calabar, where socioeconomic, institutional, and cultural

factors may shape teachers' perceptions differently (Etieyibo & Omiegbe, 2019; Capillo, & Naanep, 2025).

Jatau, Clever and Matthew, (2025) posited that given the central role teachers play in achieving inclusive education, examining their awareness and attitudes toward inclusive education practice in primary schools in Calabar is both timely and necessary. Understanding the extent of teachers' awareness and their disposition toward inclusion will provide empirical evidence for policymakers, educational administrators, teacher education institutions, and curriculum developers in designing targeted interventions that enhance inclusive practices. Furthermore, the study will contribute to the growing body of literature on inclusive education in Nigeria by identifying existing gaps in teacher preparedness and informing strategies for achieving equitable and quality education in line with national educational goals and Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Federal Ministry of Education, 2021; UNESCO, 2020).

Alassaf, (2025) and Jatau, Clever and Matthew, (2025) respectively observed that Nigeria, in alignment with this philosophy, has made legislative and policy shifts, notably with the National Policy on Inclusive Education (Federal Ministry of Education, 2016) and the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act of 2018, signaling a commitment to a non-discriminatory and equitable system (Adigun, 2021, as cited in Adigun & Nzima, 2025). Jatau, et al. (2025) further agreed that this paradigm shift requires a radical transformation of school environments, curricula and, most critically, the psycho-social disposition of the educators who are the primary implementers of these policies (Keleşoğlu, 2025). The success of inclusion, therefore, is ultimately determined not just by governmental mandates, but by the readiness and willingness of classroom teachers to embrace diversity and adapt their practice (Alassaf, 2025; Keleşoğlu, 2025).

Teachers are the linchpin of inclusive practice, as their attitude significantly influences a student's social acceptance, academic progress, and overall classroom experience (Boyle et al., 2020, as cited in Keleşoğlu, 2025; Masood Khan et al., 2020). A teacher's attitude, conceptualized as an evaluative tendency towards a specific entity (Eagly & Chaiken, 2007, as cited in Alassaf,

2025), is intrinsically linked to their levels of teacher awareness or knowledge about inclusive principles, different categories of disabilities, and the requisite pedagogical strategies (Kamenopoulou et al., 2016). Numerous studies in Nigeria and globally have found that teachers often exhibit a moderate or ambivalent attitude toward inclusion, frequently coupled with a low level of knowledge or awareness, particularly concerning specific conditions like Intellectual Disability (ID) (Nwabuekze & Adeleke, 2024; Otu et al., 2024; Otu & Egaga, 2024; Keleşoğlu, 2025).

When awareness is low, it can lead to negative attitudes, which in turn create barriers that undermine the very principle of inclusion by alienating children who require the most support (Tunde-Awe, 2014 cited in Otu et al., 2019). Conversely, higher awareness, especially when coupled with practical training, is consistently associated with more positive attitudes and a higher perceived competence to teach in inclusive classrooms (Alassaf, 2025; Luyten et al., 2025; Otu et al., 2019). The current study is thus premised on the understanding that probing the interplay between awareness and attitude is foundational to identifying key intervention areas.

Understanding the factors that shape teacher attitudes is more insightful than simply quantifying them (Keleşoğlu, 2025). This study adopts a more granular approach by examining three critical variables: gender, cultural beliefs about disability, and perceived behavioural control, which collectively influence a teacher's willingness to implement inclusive practices, often operating within the framework of the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991, as cited in Keleşoğlu, 2025). Gender has yielded mixed, yet significant, findings in inclusion research. While some studies suggest female teachers may report slightly more positive attitudes toward certain aspects of inclusion (Saloviita, 2020, as cited in Luyten et al., 2023), others find male and female teachers hold similar views, or that the direction of the difference depends on the type of disability (Alassaf, 2025; Luyten et al., 2023). Given the context of Nigerian primary education, where a significant portion of the workforce is female, exploring gender-based differences remains crucial for targeted training efforts.

Cultural beliefs about disability are powerful determinants of societal and individual attitudes (Otu et al., 2024). In many African contexts, disability is often associated with supernatural causes, stigma, or a social burden, beliefs that are deeply embedded and often translate into negative teacher perceptions, low expectations, and reduced acceptance of students with special needs (Nwabuekze & Adeleke, 2024; Otu et al., 2024). These deep-seated cultural norms can override official policy and professional training, highlighting the need to address them explicitly when examining attitudes toward inclusion in a specific locale like Calabar South.

Perceived behavioural control (PBC), a teacher's belief in their ability to perform the complex tasks required by inclusive education, often equated with self-efficacy, is perhaps the most potent predictor of intention and actual behavior (Otu et al., 2020). Even teachers who hold a positive philosophical attitude toward inclusion may lack the confidence or feel insufficiently supported and trained to execute the practices effectively (Keleşoğlu, 2025; Mentel et al., 2024; Dignath et al., 2025). This perceived lack of competence, often stemming from inadequate institutional support and poor training, is a significant barrier that warrants detailed investigation, especially in the resource-constrained environment of public primary schools in Nigeria (Otu et al., 2019; Otu & Egaga, 2024).

Despite the official adoption of inclusive education in Nigeria, the gap between policy and practice persists, often attributed to the inadequate preparation and attitudes of regular classroom teachers (Otu et al., 2019; Otu & Egaga, 2024). Existing literature suggests that general classroom teachers in the Calabar region have low knowledge and, in some cases, negative perceptions, particularly toward students with Intellectual Disability (Nwabuekze & Adeleke, 2024; Otu & Egaga, 2024). However, a comprehensive, multi-faceted survey that simultaneously investigates levels of awareness, attitude, gender, the influence of cultural beliefs, and perceived behavioural control among primary school teachers in the specific context of Calabar South Local Government Area remains sparse. A focused study in this region is necessary to provide localized data that can inform tailored professional development and policy recommendations.

Purpose of the study

This study was conducted to assess the awareness and attitude towards inclusive practices among primary school teachers in Calabar South Local Government Area. Specifically, this study aims to:

- i. Determine if levels of teacher awareness will significantly predict positive attitudes toward inclusive education;
- ii. Assess the relationship between gender and teachers' awareness and attitudes toward inclusion;
- iii. Investigate the influence of cultural beliefs about disability on the teachers' attitudes toward inclusion.
- iv. Investigate if perceived behavioural control will predict teachers' behavioural intentions toward inclusion.

Research questions

- i. To what extent does teacher level of awareness predict positive attitudes toward inclusive education?
- ii. How does teacher's gender influence teachers' awareness and attitudes toward inclusion?
- iii. How do cultural beliefs about disability influence the teachers' attitudes toward inclusion?
- iv. How does teachers perceived behavioural control predict teachers' behavioural intentions toward inclusion?

Research Hypothesis

H¹: Teachers levels of awareness will significantly predict positive attitudes toward inclusive education.

H²: Gender will moderate the relationship between awareness and attitudes toward inclusion.

H³: Cultural beliefs about disability will negatively influence teacher attitudes toward inclusion.

H⁴: Perceived behavioural control will predict behavioural intentions toward inclusion.

Research design and methods

This study employs a descriptive survey research design to systematically teachers' awareness and attitude towards inclusive education practice in primary school in Calabar. Multistage sampling technique was used in the selection of sample for the study. 270 primary school teachers were sampled for the study. The first stage is the use of stratified random sampling to categorize schools into urban and semi-urban settings. This was followed by the selection of ten schools from each stratum, making a total of 20 schools. The third stage is the use of systematic random sampling for the selection of 270 primary school teachers as sample for the study. A researcher designed structure questionnaire titled "Teacher Awareness and Attitude to Inclusive Education Practice" (TAAIEP) was used in this study.

Both content and face validity was done by experts in test and measurement, in the University of Calabar. The reliability was done using test-retest method, where 20 copies of the instruments were given to teacher in schools not selected for the study. Two weeks later, the same sets of instrument was again administered to the same group of teachers. Data collected was analysed using Pearson Product Correlation Analysis, the analysis produced a correlation value of 0.67, which was considered reliable enough for data collection for the study. Data analyses were done using inferential analysis like- Regression Analysis, Moderation Analysis, Multiple Regression and Hierarchical Regression in this study.

Result and discussion

H₁: Higher levels of teacher awareness will significantly predict more positive attitudes toward inclusive education.

The regression analysis confirms that awareness significantly predicts attitudes toward inclusive education ($\beta = 0.521$, $t = 9.31$, $p < 0.001$). The model explains 27.1% of the variance in attitudes, supporting Hypothesis 1. For every one-unit increase in awareness, attitudes increase by 0.567 units.

Table 1: Regression Analysis - Awareness Predicting Attitudes

Variable	B	SE B	β	t	p-value
Constant	2.134	0.156		13.67	< 0.001
Awareness	0.567	0.061	0.521	9.31	< 0.001

Model Summary: $R^2 = 0.271$, $F(1,250) = 86.67$, $p < 0.001$

H²: Gender will moderate the relationship between awareness and attitudes toward inclusion.

Table 2: Moderation Analysis - Gender Effect

Variable	B	SE B	β	t	p-value
Constant	2.087	0.158		13.21	< 0.001
Awareness	0.489	0.087	0.449	5.62	< 0.001
Gender	0.156	0.082	0.134	1.90	0.059
Awareness $\times$ Gender	0.187	0.115	0.126	1.63	0.105

Model Summary: $R^2 = 0.284$, $F(3,248) = 32.84$, $p < 0.001$

The interaction between awareness and gender is not statistically significant ($p = 0.105$), failing to support Hypothesis 2. Both male and female teachers show similar relationships between awareness and attitudes, suggesting that gender does not significantly moderate this relationship.

H³: Cultural beliefs about disability will negatively influence teacher attitudes toward inclusion.

Table 3: Multiple Regression - Cultural Beliefs Predicting Attitudes

Cultural Belief	B	SE B	β	t	p-value
Constant	3.789	0.245		15.47	< 0.001
Medical Model	-0.089	0.041	-0.138	-2.17	0.031
Spiritual/Supernatural	-0.156	0.038	-0.272	-4.11	< 0.001
Stigma/Discrimination	-0.201	0.045	-0.300	-4.47	< 0.001
Rights-Based	0.267	0.049	0.344	5.45	< 0.001
Community Acceptance	0.145	0.047	0.207	3.09	0.002

Model Summary: $R^2 = 0.456$, $F(5,246) = 41.23$, $p < 0.001$

The analysis strongly supports Hypothesis 3. Traditional cultural beliefs (spiritual/supernatural, stigma/discrimination) significantly and negatively predict attitudes toward inclusion, while rights-based beliefs and community acceptance positively predict attitudes. The model explains 45.6% of the variance in attitudes.

H⁴: Perceived behavioural control will predict behavioural intentions beyond the effect of attitudes.

Table 4: Hierarchical Regression - Perceived Control Effect

Step	Variable	B	SE B	B	t	p-value	R ² Change
1	Awareness	0.774	0.065	0.579	11.91	< 0.001	0.335
2	Attitudes	0.623	0.071	0.466	8.77	< 0.001	
	Perceived Control	0.234	0.057	0.218	4.11	< 0.001	0.043

Final Model: $R^2 = 0.378$, $F(2,249) = 75.82$, $p < 0.001$

Perceived behavioural control significantly predicts behavioural intentions ($\beta = 0.218$, $t = 4.11$, $p < 0.001$) beyond the effect of attitudes, supporting Hypothesis 4. The addition of perceived control explains an additional 4.3% of variance in behavioural intentions.

Discussion of findings

Awareness as predictor of attitudes toward inclusive education

The result of this study confirms that awareness significantly predicts attitudes toward inclusive education. This result indicates that well informed teachers have their attitude toward inclusive education influenced in most cases, positively. The finding of this study is supported by Alassaf, (2025) on training and knowledge as predictors of attitude toward inclusive education. The finding indicated that prior autism-related training and higher educational qualifications were significant predictors of both higher knowledge and moderate attitudes toward inclusive education for children with autism. This suggests that a foundational level of specific awareness (training/knowledge) is crucial for shaping attitudes. Also, study by Capillo and Naanep (2025), in

a study of school stakeholders, found a significant correlation between high awareness (of the concept, importance, challenges, and policies of IE) and very positive attitudes toward inclusion. They underscored the need for targeted professional development to enhance understanding and practice. Also, in a representative survey of school communities in Ireland, O'Brien (2025) noted that knowledge of autism was high and attitudes toward inclusion were generally positive. This suggests the interplay between awareness and positive attitude toward inclusive education.

The concept that acquiring knowledge positively influences beliefs, which subsequently shape attitudes, aligns with the Knowledge-Attitude-Behavior (KAB) framework. For instance, a hypothesis explored by Voicu et al. (2023) was that the cognitive dimension of inclusive attitudes (beliefs) is best predicted by special education training. However, study by Aihie and Uwaoluetan (2022) revealed that while many Nigerian primary school teachers possessed basic knowledge of autism, their attitudes toward inclusion were still largely negative, indicating a gap between basic awareness and full acceptance/positive implementation attitude.

The interaction between awareness and gender on inclusive education

The finding of this study established that the interaction between awareness and gender is not statistically significant in attitude toward inclusive education. While many studies find that gender or awareness (knowledge/training) individually predict attitudes toward inclusive education (IE), a review of literature also reveals findings that the interaction effect between awareness/training and gender is often not statistically significant. This means that the effect of training on attitude is similar for both male and female educators, or that the gender difference in attitude holds true regardless of the level of awareness. In support to the finding of this research work, a study by Singh and Rani (2020) on the impact of training programs on teacher attitudes found that the improvement in attitudes toward inclusive education post-intervention was statistically similar for both male and female teachers. This indicates that while awareness (in the form of training) significantly improved attitudes, it did so without a significant interaction with gender, suggesting the training itself was the primary driver for change.

Research focusing on the implementation of IE in resource-constrained environments often finds that factors like available resources, class size, and administrative support are stronger predictors of attitude than demographic variables like gender or the interaction term. Tenha, (2022), while examining teacher perceptions, found that the perceived lack of practical awareness (resources and training) was the critical barrier, and its impact on negative attitudes was uniformly high for both male and female teachers, suggesting the interaction effect was negligible. In cases where a gender difference exists (with females often scoring higher), some studies show this is a main effect of gender and not an interaction effect with awareness: These findings are crucial as they suggest that resources and time spent on professional development for inclusive education are equally effective for all educators, which has direct implications for policy planning and training implementation.

However, some studies have identified gender as a significant main effect and predictor of inclusive attitudes, contradicting the finding of this study. Alassaf, (2025) found that female gender was a significant predictor of both higher knowledge and more moderate-to-positive attitudes toward inclusive education for children with autism. This aligns with older findings and suggests female teachers are generally more accommodating and tolerant of students with special needs (Khasawneh, 2018, as cited in Timo, 2018). In summary, the interaction suggests that awareness (knowledge/training) is often a necessary condition for positive attitudes, and gender may be a pre-existing factor that mediates this relationship.

Traditional cultural beliefs (spiritual/supernatural, stigma/discrimination) as predictor of attitudes toward inclusion

This study revealed that traditional cultural beliefs (spiritual/supernatural, stigma/discrimination) significantly and negatively predict attitudes toward inclusion. Many research works provide strong evidence that traditional cultural beliefs, particularly those rooted in spiritual/supernatural causes of disability and subsequent stigma/discrimination, are powerful negative predictors of positive attitudes toward inclusive education. These deep-seated societal

perceptions act as a significant barrier to the successful implementation of inclusive policies, often overshadowing official support. In many cultural contexts, disability is not viewed through a medical or social lens but through a spiritual or supernatural one. This interpretation directly influences the willingness to include individuals with disabilities:

in support of the finding of this study, studies in contexts influenced by Hindu philosophy, such as India, show that cultural beliefs attribute disability to the law of karma, viewing it as the result of a "bad deed" or sin in a present or past life. This perspective leads to the disability being seen as a moral burden or punishment, fostering negative attitudes and a reluctance to fully integrate the child into mainstream society or education (Shenoy, 2019). When a disability is perceived as being caused by witchcraft, ancestral curses, or divine punishment, beliefs common in many African and some contexts, the child is often isolated or viewed with fear. This belief system directly contributes to exclusion, discrimination, and negative attitudes toward inclusion, as documented by research highlighting that negative attitudes and perceptions undermine the abilities of children with disabilities (Nsanjabera, 2024). Research also highlights that societal taboo and inadequate understanding by parents and the communities for children with disabilities deny them the opportunity for schooling in professional schools (Jatau et al, 2025). This external social pressure translates into a lack of support for inclusion among parents and educators. Nsanjabera, (2024) however stated that addressing negative attitudes toward an inclusive society and education requires comprehensive efforts to challenge stereotypes, remove barriers, and promote awareness and acceptance.

Perceived behavioural control as predictor of behavioural intentions

This study established that perceived behavioural control significantly predicts behavioural intentions toward inclusive education. The finding is a cornerstone of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and has been consistently and robustly supported across diverse behavioral domains in research work. Perceived behavioural control refers to an individual's perception of the ease or difficulty of performing a behavior, which is influenced by their beliefs about having the

necessary resources and opportunities. Recent literature confirms perceived behavioural control's central role as one of the three main predictors (along with Attitude and Subjective Norms) of behavioral intention.

These findings consistently validate the core perceived behavioural control proposition, the more people believe they have the ability, resources, and opportunity to perform a behavior (high perceived behavioural control), the stronger their behavioral intention will be to actually carry it out (Drew, 2023). The finding of this study supports the result of the study by Martinez and Lewis, (2016) which indicates that adults showing perceived behavioral control moderations of associations between attitude and intention. The study also show perceived norms and intention to engage in behaviors. The indication is that attitude or perceived norms toward the behavior is more strongly associated with behavioral intention among participants.

Conclusion

This study established that teachers' awareness is critical in shaping their attitude toward inclusion of learners with special needs educationally. This suggests that it is imperatives to embark in various training activities that can enhance knowledge level of teachers on inclusive education. Teachers are the pivotal of education, and their acceptance of learners with special needs is very important, which must be sought after. This study therefore concludes that awareness creation on inclusive education can enhance teachers' compliance and thereby foster effective acceptance of people with disabilities in the regular primary schools in Cross River state.

Limitation of the study

This study was carried out in Calabar, therefore, due to geographical distinction, the findings of this study may not be generalized to the primary school teachers outside Calabar Metropolis. This study is also limited in content scope to teachers' awareness and attitude towards Inclusive Education Practice in Primary School. Therefore, the findings of the study cannot be generalized to post-primary education sectors.

Recommendations

1. Government should embark on aggressive awareness creation on inclusive education among regular primary schools teachers. This will enhance their knowledge and increase their readiness to accept learners with special needs.
2. Non-Governmental Organisations should support government efforts in creating awareness about inclusive education, and disability acceptance.
3. Government should enhance teachers' capacity by providing opportunities for in-service training through conferences, workshops, seminars and part time programmes.
4. government and other stakeholders should sponsor public awareness programme that will foster positive change of societal attitude and beliefs about disabilities

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