The Relationship Between Teachers' Awareness and Attitudes Toward Inclusive Education[1]

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Abstract

Inclusive education has become a central component of contemporary educational policies aimed at ensuring equity, diversity, and equal learning opportunities for all students. The purpose of the study is to determine whether there is a significant relationship between teachers' awareness and attitudes toward inclusive education. We designed a quantitative study using a relational survey model. The sample of the research consists of 448 teachers selected from the teachers working in different branches and education levels in Gaziantep province in Turkey by using the cluster sampling method. To collect data in the research, the "Teacher Awareness Scale for Inclusive Education" and the "Teacher Attitude Scale towards Inclusive Education" were used. The data obtained in the study was first tested for normality. Based on the normal distribution of the data, t-test and one-way analysis of variance were performed. In addition, correlation analysis was performed to examine the relationship between the variables. The results show that teachers' awareness and attitudes toward inclusive education are at a high level. A positive and moderate relationship was found between teachers' awareness of inclusive education and their attitudes towards inclusive education. Based on these findings, it can be suggested that professional development programs focusing on inclusive education practices may further strengthen teachers' awareness and foster more positive attitudes. Future research may examine the underlying factors influencing this relationship using qualitative or mixed-method designs.

Keywords: Attitude, Awareness, Inclusive Education, Teachers

Introduction

In the past, inclusive education was predominantly viewed as education for students with special needs, but nowadays, the scope of inclusive education has expanded considerably. Inclusive education encompasses all children, regardless of whether they have special needs or disabilities, who face difficulties in accessing social, cultural, educational, vital activities, and opportunities on an equal basis with all members of society. It emphasizes the right of these children to receive education on equal terms with their peers (Aktekin et al., 2017).

In education, inclusivity is related to ensuring that every student feels valued and respected in educational environments and can benefit from a sense of belonging (UNESCO, 2020). However, there

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are many obstacles to the idea of inclusivity. Prejudices, discrimination, and experiences of alienation often lead to the exclusion of individuals due to their differences (Ainscow, 2020; Slee, 2018). Such barriers may negatively affect not only students' social participation but also their equitable access to educational opportunities (Florian, 2019). Research has shown that negative attitudes, structural inequalities, and exclusionary practices within schools continue to challenge the effective implementation of inclusive education (UNESCO, 2020).

The Role of Teachers in Inclusive Education

Inclusive education involves a shift towards the inclusion of all students in general education classrooms and schools without any form of segregation. It encompasses providing the necessary support and services that students may require, such as access to assistive devices, teacher assistants, and adapted curricula (Hayes & Bulat, 2017).

In some countries, inclusive education is viewed as an approach primarily aimed at serving disabled children in general education classrooms (Ainscow, 2005). However, inclusive education is about enriching education and instruction to ensure that all disadvantaged groups, regardless of characteristics or conditions such as gender, ethnicity, language, religion, location, health status, and socioeconomic status, have the opportunity to learn (ERG, 2016).

Teachers are among the most critical stakeholders in the education process. They are the ones who communicate with students on an individual basis and who plan and implement instructional practices. In the context of inclusive education, teachers play a central role in enacting inclusive pedagogical approaches and supporting diverse learners within the classroom (UNESCO, 2005). For the success of inclusive education, it is essential that teachers possess the knowledge, skills, and values to address the needs of students with diverse characteristics in their classrooms.

To ensure the successful implementation of inclusive education, teachers have certain responsibilities. According to Aytaç (2023, p. 215), some of the responsibilities of teachers in the context of inclusive education include:

1. Valuing students' opinions and choices, providing them with opportunities to discuss their strengths, weaknesses, and preferred learning methods.
2. Collaborating with parents to promote active participation among student groups.
3. Creating learning environments that enhance students' happiness and holistic success, ensuring their active participation.
4. Prioritizing a facilitative role and cooperative learning approach over an authoritarian approach towards students.
5. Managing the classroom in accordance with inclusive education principles and shaping the teaching-learning process.
6. Maintaining regular communication with students, parents, other teachers, and school administrators regarding students' development.

One of the most significant factors influencing teacher attitudes is a lack of knowledge. Teachers may feel anxious about teaching a student with disabilities whom they have never encountered before and

may even be reluctant to admit the student into their class (Ünay & Çakıroğlu, 2021). Therefore, it is important for teachers to increase their knowledge of inclusive education to change their attitudes positively. To achieve this, teachers should participate in various inclusive education training programs and stay informed about current developments.

Schools have a wide variety of students with differences in personality traits, interests, language skills, learning styles, physical differences, emotional competencies, socioeconomic levels, and sociocultural backgrounds (Uçar, 2023). In implementing inclusive education, teachers should consider these differences and use various methods and techniques. Relying solely on lecture-based teaching can create a passive classroom, leading to students falling behind, especially those with different learning characteristics. When teachers primarily serve as information providers and supervisors, students become passive recipients responsible for listening to the lecture, reading textbooks, and answering written or oral exam questions (Şahinel, 2020). This situation limits students' learning to memorization, which is not an effective learning method for all students. To provide effective education, teachers need to know and accept their students' characteristics, plan activities to reduce prejudice towards different cultural and racial groups, and make use of students' previous learning experiences (Demir Başaran, 2019).

The Relationship Between Teachers' Awareness and Attitudes Toward Inclusive Education

Teachers' awareness and attitudes toward inclusive education are conceptually and empirically interconnected constructs. Awareness refers to teachers' knowledge, understanding, and sensitivity regarding inclusive education principles, policies, and practices, whereas attitudes reflect their cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dispositions toward inclusion. The literature indicates that teachers with higher levels of awareness and knowledge of inclusive education tend to develop more positive attitudes, as increased understanding may reduce uncertainty, anxiety, and resistance to inclusive practices (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Forlin, 2010). Conversely, insufficient awareness and limited professional knowledge may contribute to negative or ambivalent attitudes, potentially constraining teachers' willingness and confidence to implement inclusive strategies effectively (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). Therefore, examining the relationship between teachers' awareness and attitudes is essential for understanding the factors that influence the successful implementation of inclusive education.

Previous Research on Teachers' Awareness and Attitudes

International research has extensively examined teachers' perceptions of inclusive education, particularly focusing on awareness, attitudes, and professional readiness. Studies exploring teacher awareness suggest considerable variability across contexts. For instance, Forlin and Chambers (2011) reported that while teacher candidates demonstrated increased knowledge following training, their concerns regarding inclusive practices also intensified. González-Gil et al. (2013) found that teachers perceived significant training needs related to inclusive methodologies and school transformation processes. Similarly, Chan and Yuen (2015) observed that although schools may successfully cultivate inclusive cultures, teachers often struggle to translate awareness into effective classroom practices.

Conversely, other studies identified low awareness levels, especially in under-resourced or rural settings (Abbas et al., 2016; Adeniyi-Egbeola & Tunde-Awe, 2018). Das (2021) noted that teachers might

be familiar with inclusive concepts yet feel inadequately prepared to provide appropriate instructional support.

Research investigating teacher attitudes toward inclusive education likewise reveals mixed findings. While many teachers express generally positive orientations toward inclusion (Avramidis & Kalyva, 2007; Kraska & Boyle, 2014), concerns regarding workload, classroom management, and institutional support remain prevalent (Saloviita & Schaffus, 2016). Comparative studies demonstrated that attitudes may differ across countries and professional roles, with special education teachers often reporting more favorable attitudes than general education teachers (Savolainen et al., 2012; Saloviita, 2020). More recent studies further highlight the multidimensional nature of attitudes, showing discrepancies between emotional, behavioral, and cognitive components (Scanlon et al., 2022).

Importantly, although awareness and attitudes have been widely studied as separate constructs, research directly examining the relationship between teacher awareness and attitudes remains limited. Maheshwari and Shapurkar (2015) found that teachers exhibited low awareness yet moderately positive attitudes, suggesting that insufficient knowledge may restrict the translation of positive beliefs into inclusive practices. This indicates a potential conceptual and empirical gap regarding how awareness and attitudes interact.

National Research Context

Within the national literature, studies predominantly focus on specific teacher groups (e.g., classroom teachers, preschool teachers) or emphasize particular subdimensions such as mainstreaming or refugee education. Findings frequently underline challenges related to insufficient training, classroom management difficulties, and limited institutional support (Akalın, 2015; Bayram, 2019; Sakız, 2016).

Several studies reported that teachers generally hold positive attitudes toward inclusive education but experience difficulties in practical implementation (Bayram, 2019; Demir Başaran, 2021). Research on refugee education further highlights issues related to communication barriers, overcrowded classrooms, and perceived inadequacy of professional preparation (Doğan & Avcıoğlu, 2022; Yıldırım, 2017).

Despite the growing body of research on teacher attitudes, studies examining teacher awareness, particularly across different branches and educational levels, remain comparatively scarce. Moreover, empirical investigations explicitly addressing the awareness–attitude relationship are notably limited.

Rationale of the Research

Education is a social right for every individual. Throughout history and up to the present day, there have been and will continue to be individuals who are disadvantaged due to their characteristics. These individuals are also a part of society. This study is a current work that addresses disadvantaged groups facing challenges in accessing their right to education, despite all the regulations made to ensure that every individual benefits from their right to education.

Within inclusive education, teachers represent a decisive factor influencing both the quality and effectiveness of implementation. Teachers' awareness and attitudes are particularly important, as they shape classroom practices, instructional decisions, and interactions with diverse learners. Although previous research has examined teachers' awareness and attitudes separately, empirical studies investigating their combined patterns and interrelationships remain limited.

This study is important for several reasons. First, it provides evidence on teachers' awareness and attitudes toward inclusive education. Second, it examines whether these variables differ according to key contextual factors, including school level, participation in in-service training, and the presence of disadvantaged students in classrooms. Third, it analyzes the relationship between awareness and attitudes, contributing to a clearer understanding of how cognitive and affective dimensions interact. Finally, by testing the predictive role of awareness on attitudes, the study offers implications for teacher education, professional development, and policy design.

Aims of the Study

The aim of this research is to determine whether there is a significant relationship between teachers' awareness of inclusive education and their attitudes. The aims underscored the following specific research questions:

- What are teachers' levels of awareness and attitudes toward inclusive education?
- Do teachers' awareness and attitudes toward inclusive education differ significantly according to selected variables (school level, participation in in-service training, and the presence of disadvantaged groups in their classrooms)?
- Is there a significant relationship between teachers' awareness of inclusive education and their attitudes toward inclusive education?
- Do teachers' awareness levels significantly predict their attitudes toward inclusive education?

Method

This study is quantitative research designed using a correlational survey model. According to Karasar (2011), in the correlational survey model, "an attempt is made to determine whether variables change together and if there is a change, how it occurs." In this study, which aims to determine whether the attitudes of teachers teaching at different educational levels regarding inclusive education, their awareness of inclusive education, and their relationships vary according to different variables, a correlational research approach was employed.

Population and Sample

The population of this study consists of teachers working in Gaziantep, Turkey. The sample of the study consists of 448 teachers selected using cluster sampling method from different branches and educational levels working in Gaziantep province, Turkey. Within this framework, schools were defined as clusters, and a two-stage sampling procedure was employed. In the first stage, schools representing different educational levels (primary, middle, and high school) were identified. In the second stage, teachers were randomly selected from the chosen schools. Of the participants, 54.7% are female, and 45.3% are male. Among the 448 teachers, 54.7% have received in-service training/seminars related to inclusive education. 31.5% of the 448 teachers have 1-5 years of professional experience. 80.4% of the 448 teachers have disadvantaged students in their classrooms. 40.2% of the 448 teachers work at the middle school level. Among the 448 teachers from 25 different branches who participated in the research, 16.1% are classroom teachers.

Instrumentation and Data Collection

In the research, the data collection tools used were the Inclusive Education Awareness Scale and the Teacher Attitude Scale towards Inclusive Education. The Inclusive Education Awareness Scale is a scale developed by Kılcan and Şimşek (2021) to measure teachers' awareness levels of inclusive education. The scale consists of 22 items. The scale includes six items in the "Aim of Inclusive Education" dimension, five items in the "Inclusive Education for Disadvantaged Groups" dimension, four items in the "Inclusive Education and Legislation" dimension, four items in the "Success in Inclusive Education" dimension, and three items in the "Origin of Inclusive Education" dimension. The scale uses a 5-point Likert-type scale with options of "Strongly Agree (5), Agree (4), Undecided (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1)" to determine participants' levels of agreement with the statements. The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients of the scale range from 0.62 to 0.88. In this study, the reliability coefficients of the scale calculated within the scope of this study ranged from .81 to .93.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted to examine whether the original factor structure of the scale was supported by the data obtained in this study. The results indicated that the model demonstrated acceptable fit indices: $\chi^2(df = 199) = 641$, $p < .001$, CFI = .904, TLI = .889, RMSEA = .070 (90% CI [.064, .077]). Although the chi-square statistic was significant, which is common in large samples, other fit indices suggested that the model exhibited an acceptable level of fit.

The Teacher Attitude Scale towards Inclusive Education is a scale developed by Şimşek (2019) to measure teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education. The sub-dimensions of the scale are "The Necessity of Social Collaboration in Inclusive Education" and "The Necessity of Increasing Interest in Inclusive Education." The scale items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from Strongly Agree, Agree, Undecided, Disagree to Strongly Disagree. The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients of the scale were found to be 0.89 and 0.91, indicating that the scale is highly reliable. The reliability coefficients of the scale calculated within the scope of this study ranged from .76 to .80.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted to verify the construct validity of the scale within the current sample. The results demonstrated that the measurement model exhibited good fit indices: $\chi^2(df = 201) = 458$, $p < .001$, CFI = .918, TLI = .906, RMSEA = .053 (90% CI [.047, .060]). Although the chi-square statistic was significant, other fit indices indicated that the model achieved a good level of fit.

Ethical approvals and official permissions from the relevant authorities were obtained prior to data collection. Following the ethics committee approval, the necessary research permission was granted by the Gaziantep Provincial Directorate of National Education. During the second semester of the 2021–2022 academic year, the researcher visited the selected schools, and the study was conducted with volunteer teachers. Before administering the instruments, participants were verbally informed about the purpose of the study and the procedures for completing the personal information form and the scales. Teachers were also informed about the confidentiality of the data and the importance of providing sincere and objective responses.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS 25 software. The dataset was analyzed using descriptive statistics, independent samples t-tests, one-way ANOVA, Pearson correlation analysis, and stepwise regression analysis.

Prior to conducting parametric analyses, the assumptions of normality and homogeneity of variances were examined. Normality was assessed using skewness and kurtosis coefficients calculated from the total scores of the Inclusive Education Awareness Scale and the Teacher Attitude Scale towards Inclusive Education.

The skewness and kurtosis values were found to be within the acceptable range of -1 to +1 (Awareness: skewness = -0.337, kurtosis = -0.338; Attitude: skewness = -0.414, kurtosis = -0.598), indicating that the data demonstrated an approximately normal distribution (Büyüköztürk, 2019). The homogeneity of variances assumption was tested using Levene's test. The results showed that the variances were homogeneous across comparison groups ($p > .05$). Based on these findings, parametric statistical analyses were deemed appropriate.

Independent samples t-tests were used to examine differences based on gender and participation in inclusive education-related in-service training. One-way ANOVA was employed to analyze differences according to professional seniority, school level, and teaching branch.

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to determine the direction and strength of the relationship between teachers' awareness and attitudes toward inclusive education. Additionally, stepwise regression analysis was performed to evaluate the predictive role of awareness dimensions on teachers' attitudes.

Findings

This findings section should include the results of study. All tables, figures, graphs, statistical analyses and sample calculations should be presented in this section.

RQ1. What are the levels of teachers' awareness regarding inclusive education?

Teachers' awareness levels toward inclusive education were examined using descriptive statistics. The mean and standard deviation values for each dimension are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Mean and Standard Deviation Values for Teachers' Awareness of Inclusive Education

n = 448	M	SD
Aim of Inclusive Education	4.50	.44
Inclusive Education for Disadvantaged Groups	4.44	.54
Inclusive Education and Legislation	3.82	.78
Success in Inclusive Education	4.40	.53
Origin of Inclusive Education	3.60	.84
Awareness Total	4.22	.45

According to Table 1, teachers have a high level of awareness of inclusive education. The lowest score is in the "Origins of Inclusive Education" dimension.

The mean and standard deviation values for teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

The Average and Standard Deviation Values for Teachers' Attitudes Towards Inclusive Education

n= 448	M	SD
Cooperation	4.05	.37
Relevance	4.43	.45
Attitude Total	4.17	.36

According to Table 2, teachers have a high level of attitudes towards inclusive education.

RQ2. Do teachers' awareness and attitudes toward inclusive education differ significantly according to selected variables (school level, participation in in-service training, and the presence of disadvantaged groups in their classrooms)?

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to determine whether teachers' awareness levels differed according to school level. Results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Results for Inclusive Education Awareness by School Level Variable

Group	n	M	SD	Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	*F*	*p*
Pre-school	16	4.57	.39	Between Groups	2.056	3	.685	3.39	.02
Primary school	85	4.58	.40	Within Groups	89.655	444	.202		
Middle school	180	4.46	.45	Total	91.710	447			
High school	167	4.50	.45						

According to Table 3, there is a significant difference among teachers' awareness of inclusive education ($F_{(3\text{-}444)} = 3.39$, $p < 0.05$). To determine which groups the significant difference is between, Scheffe post-hoc tests were conducted. According to the Scheffe test results, middle school and high school teachers have significantly higher means compared to preschool and elementary school teachers. The comparison of mean scores for inclusive education awareness by in-service training status is presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Results for Inclusive Education Awareness by In-Service Training Status Variable

Variable	In-Service Training Status	n	M	SD	DF	*t*	*p*
Awareness	Yes	245	4.35	.40	446	6.54	0.00
	No	203	4.08	.46			

According to Table 4, the level of awareness of inclusive education is significantly higher among teachers who received in-service training compared to teachers who did not receive in-service training (t = 6.54; p < 0.05). The comparison of mean scores for inclusive education awareness by the status of having disadvantaged students is shown in Table 5.

Table 5

Results for Inclusive Education Awareness by The Status of Having Disadvantaged Students Variable

Variable	The status of having disadvantaged students	n	M	SD	DF	*t*	*p*
Awareness	Yes	360	4.25	.44	446	2.38	0.02
	No	88	4.12	.47			

According to Table 5, teachers who have disadvantaged students in their classrooms have significantly higher levels of awareness about inclusive education compared to teachers who do not have disadvantaged students in their classrooms (t = 6.54; p < 0.05).

ANOVA was conducted to determine if there was a significant difference in teachers' attitude levels of inclusive education based on the school level variable. The results are presented in Table 6.

Table 6

Results for Inclusive Education Attitude by School Level Variable

Group	n	M	SD	Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	*F*	*p*
Pre-school	16	4.06	.37	Between Groups	.244	3	.081	.62	.60
Primary school	85	4.17	.35	Within Groups	57.919	444	.130		
Middle school	180	4.17	.35	Total	58.163	447			
High school	167	4.19	.36						

According to Table 6, there is no significant difference in teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education based on the school level variable ($F_{(3\text{-}444)}$ = .62, p >0.05). The comparison of mean scores for inclusive education attitude by in-service training status is shown in Table 7.

Table 7

Results for Inclusive Education Attitude by In-Service Training Status Variable

Variable	In-Service Training Status	n	M	SD	DF	*t*	*p*
Attitude	Yes	245	4.20	.34	446	1.69	0.09
	No	203	4.14	.38			

According to Table 7, there is no significant difference in teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education based on the in-service training status variable (t = 1.69; p > 0.05). The comparison of mean scores for inclusive education attitude by the status of having disadvantaged students is shown in Table 8.

Table 8

Results for Inclusive Education Attitude by The Status of Having Disadvantaged Students Variable

Variable	The status of having disadvantaged students	n	M	SD	DF	*t*	*p*
Attitude	Yes	360	4.20	.35	446	3.89	.00
	No	88	4.04	.37			

According to Table 8, teachers who have disadvantaged students in their classrooms have significantly higher levels of attitude about inclusive education compared to teachers who do not have disadvantaged students in their classrooms (t = 3.89; p < 0.05).

RQ3. Is there a significant relationship between teachers' awareness of inclusive education and their attitudes toward inclusive education?

The Pearson correlation coefficient has been calculated to determine the relationships between teachers' awareness of inclusive education and their attitudes, and the results are shown in Table 9.

Table 9

Relationship between Teachers' Awareness of Inclusive Education and Their Attitudes

		Attitude Toward Inclusive Education
Awareness of Inclusive Education	*r*	.603**
	p	.000

p<0.01

It has been determined that there is a positive and moderate relationship between teachers' awareness of inclusive education and their attitudes toward inclusive education (r = 0.603; p < 0.01).

RQ4. Do teachers' awareness levels significantly predict their attitudes toward inclusive education?

To determine the predictive power of teachers' awareness of inclusive education on their attitudes toward inclusive education, regression analysis was conducted. The results of the regression analysis are shown in Table 10.

Table 10

Regression Analysis Results

Model 1	B	SE	*ß*
Intercept	2.146	0.128	
Awareness Total	0.480	0.030	0.603[a]

Note: For Model 1, R^2=0.363; p<0.01

According to Table 10, teachers' awareness of inclusive education explains 36.3% of the variance in their attitudes toward inclusive education. The model is statistically significant ($p < 0.01$).

Discussion

The research findings indicate that teachers have a high level of awareness of inclusive education, both in the overall scale and in all sub-dimensions. This finding aligns with other research conducted in different regions and contexts. For example, Garbutt (2018), in his doctoral thesis study conducted with teachers in state primary schools in Kenya's Trans-Nzoia region, found that teachers had a high level of awareness. Imam et al. (2021) found that teacher candidates in Nigeria had a high level of awareness of inclusive education policies.

However, it's essential to note that there are also contrasting findings in the literature. Maheshwari and Shapuskar (2015) and Abbas et al. (2016) found in their studies that teachers' awareness of inclusive education was not at a sufficient level. Adeniyi-Egbeola and Tunde-Awe (2018) determined that English teachers in Nigeria's North Central region had a very low level of awareness of inclusive education, attributing this to their lack of awareness about inclusive education. In their study investigating the awareness and attitudes of preschool teachers towards inclusive education, Zabeli and Gjelaj (2020) found that although teachers were positive about admitting students with special needs into the classroom, they lacked sufficient knowledge and skills in the necessary teaching methods for working with such children. Amjed et al. (2020), in their study aimed at determining the awareness of teachers in the Punjab region, found that teachers had a moderate level of awareness. In this research, it is believed that the high level of awareness of teachers regarding inclusive education is attributed, especially in recent years, to the in-service training provided to teachers in Gaziantep, where the study was conducted, regarding inclusive education for Syrian students who came to the city through migration.

Significant differences in teachers' awareness of inclusive education were found based on the school level variable. Preschool and elementary school teachers exhibited higher levels of awareness compared to middle school and high school teachers. The reason for the higher levels of awareness of inclusive education among preschool and elementary school teachers might be attributed to their increased exposure to disadvantaged students in primary education, leading to a greater perceived need for self-improvement in this context.

According to the status of in-service training, which is another variable of the research, significant differences have been found among teachers. It has been determined that teachers who receive in-service training on inclusive education have higher levels of awareness about inclusive education compared to those who do not receive in-service training. In-service trainings play an important role in keeping teachers informed about new developments, and increasing in-service training on inclusive education, which has become widespread in recent years, is of great importance in achieving the goals of inclusive education.

According to another finding, teachers who have disadvantaged students in their classrooms were found to have higher levels of awareness of inclusive education compared to teachers who do not have disadvantaged students in their classrooms. Based on this result, it can be said that teachers in

classrooms with disadvantaged students tend to be more conscious and prepared regarding inclusive education, aiming to provide better services to these students.

It has been determined that teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education are generally at a high level for the entire scale and all sub-dimensions. This result is consistent with the findings of various studies, such as Dapudong (2014) and Dorji et al (2021), who found that teachers generally have positive attitudes towards inclusive education, Main et al. (2016), who reported that Slovenian preschool and primary school teachers have a positive attitude towards inclusive education, Şimşek (2019), who found that social studies teachers have a high attitude towards inclusive education, Desombre et al. (2019), who found that teachers have positive attitudes towards inclusive education in their research, and Alnahdi et al. (2019), whose research with participants from Finland and Saudi Arabia showed positive attitudes towards inclusive education. While Cornoldi et al. (1998) found that Italian teachers did not have a very positive perception of receiving sufficient support for implementing inclusive education, their overall positive attitudes towards inclusive education are consistent with the findings of this research. According to the results of Saloviita's (2020) research, which examined the attitudes of teachers in Finland towards inclusive education, classroom teachers scored below the neutral midpoint of the scale, while subject teachers scored significantly below the neutral midpoint. On the other hand, special education teachers had mean scores above the midpoint. Approximately 20% of teachers exhibited strong opposition to inclusive education, while 8% were strong advocates of it. Savolainen et al. (2012), in their study comparing the attitudes of teachers in Finland and South Africa towards inclusive education, found that teachers in both countries had neutral to average attitudes. Haitembu (2014) found that teachers in the Omursati region had negative attitudes towards inclusive education due to reasons such as inadequate in-service training, lack of knowledge, and insufficient support to schools. Yada and Savolainen (2017) determined that Japanese teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education were slightly above neutral, indicating a somewhat neutral stance. Imam et al. (2021) found that 59.9% of teacher candidates in Nigeria had negative attitudes, which differs from the findings of this research. As a result of this study, it is believed that the high attitudes of teachers towards inclusive education are due to their high awareness of inclusive education. Teachers can develop negative attitudes towards students with disabilities when they encounter shortcomings, they were not previously aware of. In the success of inclusive education, teachers having a positive attitude towards students plays a crucial role.

Teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education do not show significant differences based on the school level variable. Although a more positive attitude has been observed, especially in the high school group, this difference is not statistically significant. Similarly, Aksungur (2022) also found that school administrators exhibited similar attitudes across different school levels. However, in the study conducted by Galović et al. (2014), it was found that high school and preschool teachers had a more positive attitude towards inclusive education compared to elementary and middle school teachers. These variations may be attributed to differences in teachers' education and experience levels, local education policies, or other factors. These findings indicate that teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education do not vary significantly depending on the school level.

The results indicate that there is no significant difference in teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education based on their participation in in-service training. This result is consistent with Şimşek's (2019) study, which found no significant difference in the attitudes towards the necessity of social collaboration in inclusive education and the general attitudes towards inclusive education between

teachers who had previously participated in in-service training or seminars and those who had not. This result aligns with the research findings. However, it's important to note that there are studies in the literature that have arrived at different conclusions. For instance, Avramidis and Kalyva (2007) found that teachers who had received prior training in inclusive education in Greece had significantly more positive attitudes compared to those who had not received such training. Lika (2016) also concluded that teachers who had undergone in-service training had more positive attitudes. Şimşek (2019) did find similarities in the attitudes of teachers who had and had not participated in in-service training regarding the sub-dimension of increasing interest in inclusive education. On the other hand, Yılmaz (2021) determined that foreign language teachers who had received additional training in inclusive education had more positive attitudes and suggested that this might be because teachers without prior knowledge on the topic could have negative attitudes. Similarly, Scanlon et al. (2022) found that teachers in Bulgarian kindergartens who had previously taken courses on inclusive education had more positive cognitive and affective attitudes. Based on the results obtained in the research, it is believed that the similarity in attitudes towards inclusive education among teachers who have and have not received in-service training may be attributed to a shared belief that all teachers, regardless of their training, have an attitude that every student has the right to education.

The study has determined that there is a significant difference in teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education based on the presence of disadvantaged students in their classrooms. Teachers who have disadvantaged students in their classrooms were found to have more positive attitudes towards inclusive education compared to teachers who do not have disadvantaged students. Similar research results can be found in the literature (Ahmmed et al., 2012; Avramidis & Kalyva, 2007; Galović et al., 2014; Scanlon et al., 2022). These findings suggest that teachers develop a more positive attitude towards inclusive education as they gain more experience with disadvantaged students in their classrooms. On the other hand, teachers who do not have disadvantaged students in their classrooms may have fewer positive attitudes towards inclusive education due to their lack of experience in this regard. These results highlight the importance of providing support and training for teachers, especially in systems where disadvantaged students are part of the educational landscape, to help them develop a more positive approach to inclusive education.

One of the noteworthy results of the study indicates a moderate positive relationship between teachers' awareness of inclusive education and their attitudes. In other words, as teachers' awareness of inclusive education increases, their attitudes also tend to become more positive. Additionally, the results highlight that teachers' awareness of inclusive education is a significant predictor of their attitudes towards inclusive education. This suggests that efforts to provide teachers with more knowledge and awareness about inclusive education within the education system can contribute to the creation of a more positive and supportive educational environment.

Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the research was conducted with teachers working only in Gaziantep, which may limit the generalizability of the results to other regions or educational contexts. Second, the data were collected using self-report measurement instruments, which may be subject to social desirability bias. Third, the study employed a cross-sectional design; therefore, causal inferences cannot be made regarding the relationships between

awareness and attitudes. Future studies may benefit from broader samples, multi-method data collection strategies, and longitudinal designs.

Conclusion

This study aimed to examine teachers' awareness of inclusive education, their attitudes toward inclusive education, and the relationship between these variables using a relational survey model. The research was conducted with 448 teachers working at different school levels and branches in Gaziantep, Turkey. The findings revealed that teachers' awareness and attitudes toward inclusive education were generally high. Furthermore, a positive and moderate relationship was identified between awareness and attitudes, and awareness was found to be a significant predictor of attitudes.

In conclusion, the findings of this research shed light on the complex interplay between teachers' awareness and attitudes towards inclusive education. It is evident that, on the whole, teachers possess a high level of awareness of inclusive education, with this awareness being positively correlated with their attitudes. This aligns with various studies conducted in different regions, affirming that awareness is a critical factor in shaping positive attitudes towards inclusive education.

However, it's important to acknowledge the contrasting findings in the literature, emphasizing that there are still challenges to be addressed. Some teachers, especially those lacking in-service training or exposure to disadvantaged students, may have fewer positive attitudes towards inclusive education. These discrepancies underline the need for targeted support and training programs to bridge the knowledge gap and promote more inclusive practices among educators.

The research also highlights the significant role of in-service training in enhancing teachers' awareness and attitudes towards inclusive education. Efforts to expand such training opportunities are crucial in fostering a more inclusive educational environment. Moreover, the presence of disadvantaged students in classrooms appears to positively influence teachers' attitudes, emphasizing the importance of creating diverse and inclusive learning environments.

Ultimately, this study underscores the interconnectedness of awareness, attitudes, and inclusive education outcomes. It reinforces the notion that informed and positively disposed teachers are essential in achieving the goals of inclusive education. As we move forward, educators, policymakers, and institutions should continue to invest in training, awareness-raising, and support systems to ensure that every student, regardless of their abilities or backgrounds, receives an equitable and inclusive education.

Building on these results, several practical implications can be drawn. First, systematic and practice-oriented in-service training programs focusing on inclusive strategies should be expanded. Second, school-level support mechanisms (e.g., collaborative planning, professional learning communities, and access to specialist support) should be strengthened to assist teachers in implementing inclusive practices. Third, policies encouraging teachers' direct experience with diverse and disadvantaged learners should be supported, as such exposure appears to foster more favorable attitudes.

For future research, studies employing qualitative and mixed-method designs may provide deeper insight into the factors shaping teachers' awareness and attitudes. Additionally, longitudinal research could help clarify how professional development initiatives influence these variables over time. Overall,

promoting both awareness and positive attitudes remains essential for the sustainable implementation of inclusive education.

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